



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07602708 9

THE FACE of the KING *by* JAMES ROBERTS

ROBERT J. SHORES, Publisher



15
24



Compliments of
the Publishers
—

Sherburne

1857

THE FACE OF THE KING

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
ASTOR, LENOX
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS



8/23/11

THE FACE OF THE KING

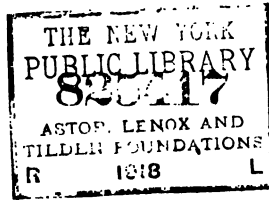
By

JAMES ROBERTS



NEW YORK
ROBERT J. SHORES
PUBLISHER

NEW YORK
PUBLISHED
1911



Copyright, 1918
By ROBERT J. SHORES

NOV 1918
LIBRARY
1918

*To my wife, whose inspiration and affection is
worth many kingdoms, I dedicate this book.*

—J. R.

THE FACE OF THE KING

CHAPTER I

IT was precisely forty-eight minutes after nine when the tall, distinguished foreigner, clad in faultless morning attire, entered the breakfast room of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in London. The room was far from crowded, most of the guests of that hostelry preferring to take their coffee and rolls, or the matutinal cup of tea, in the privacy of their own apartments. And of the few persons who were breakfasting in public upon this particular morning, few looked up at his entrance or apparently took the slightest interest in this obviously important gentleman, who carried himself as though he were accustomed to command and who came into a room as though he were not aware that anyone else might be there. The Ritz is not unaccustomed to dis-

THE FACE OF THE KING

tinguished foreigners, but it is seldom indeed that Louis, the captain in charge, is seen to greet a guest so cordially, to pull out his chair with just that degree of deference, or to select for him that table near the second window, which is the only one shedding the morning sunshine at just the proper angle upon one's newspaper.

Louis, however, was not the only one who observed the new arrival. There was one other person who glanced up at the stranger and who continued to look at him with something more than casual interest in her eye. That person was Mrs. Peter Delancey Throckmorton, American of course, and equally of course, accompanied by her pretty daughter. If one were a New Yorker, one knew Mrs. Throckmorton; not to know her, was to be ignorant of New York, for her activities were innumerable and her friends—or, at least, acquaintances—were legion. Her position in New York society was as yet unimpaired,

THE FACE OF THE KING

though when Peter D. Throckmorton had peacefully passed away, some two years before, he had left her little but his honored name and his pretty daughter; his fortune having been swept away in a mad attempt to corner cotton.

The daughter, seated opposite, looked up from her cereal.

"What is it, Mamma?" she demanded rather peevishly, "You didn't finish what you were saying—for goodness, gracious sake, at whom are you staring now?"

"Emily," said her mother severely, "I'll have you understand that I do not stare; no lady does. One may look about one I suppose without being accused of staring? I'm sure I don't know where you pick up such vulgar words. If you really wish to know what caught my attention, I don't mind telling you that it was that handsome young man who has just come in and who is sitting on your left by the far window."

THE FACE OF THE KING

Emily craned her neck in what she strove to make a casual glance in the neighborhood her mother had indicated, but there was a pillar in the way and she was disappointed. Her temper was not improved by her failure and she spoke almost snappishly:

"I do wish, Mamma, that you would not always be pointing out handsome strangers to me. I see plenty of men about when I am at home without having to inspect every man who happens to come within range of your lorgnettes. I don't believe you heard a word of what I read you out of the paper, and it was very interesting!"

"Yes, yes, my dear, I have no doubt," returned her mother absently, "It was—let me see—something about Switzerland, was it not?"

"Why, Mamma, it wasn't about Switzerland at all! It was about Servia. Don't you remember the last current topics lecture we heard in New York, when the lecturer ex-

THE FACE OF THE KING

plained all about the probability of another war between Austria and Servia, and the possibility that such a war might upset the whole of Europe again after only two years of peace? There is a long dispatch from Vienna telling all about the proposed treaty between Austria and Molbania, how the King has been putting off the Austrians and how it is now thought that he will sign the treaty some time within the next three weeks and that will mean war, and—”

Emily's eyes had returned to her paper and she took up the published account fitting it neatly onto the end of her oral utterance, while her mother, left to her own devices, returned to her contemplation of the gentleman.

It was exactly fifty-six minutes after nine when she beckoned her waiter and, under pretense of having him fill her glass with water, spoke in a low tone, “Can you tell me the name of that young man seated by the second window? His face seems very familiar to me.”

THE FACE OF THE KING

"No, Madam, I do not know it, but I will find out immediately," responded the waiter, speeding noiselessly away in search of information.

Meanwhile, the young man who was the cause of Mrs. Throckmorton's curiosity and her daughter's consequent annoyance, had given his order and was reading his paper, pending the arrival of his breakfast.

Observed, even from the standpoint of one who was not a husband-hunting mamma, he was a young man well worth looking at. Handsome in spite of a somewhat saturnine expression of countenance; broad-shouldered and deep-chested; tall and dignified. His age could not have been more than thirty-two, though he carried himself like a man of middle age—wearing an air of accustomed worldliness and looking out upon the world through a pair of dark eyes which held more of the craft of statesmanship than of the enthusiasm of youth.

THE FACE OF THE KING

Just now he was smiling; a slow amused smile which had not very much mirth in it. He might have been Italian, Spanish or Czech, though, as a matter of fact, he was pure Slav.

His eye held a cynical twinkle as he read in his paper the following dispatch from Vienna:

"It is reported here on good authority that King Rudolph of Molbania has at last been won over to the Austrian treaty and that His Majesty will cement the alliance between these two countries at some time within the next three weeks.

"The news of the King's decision has been received in Vienna with a great deal of satisfaction. The efforts of the Austrian emissaries had so long been fruitless and even the influence of his cousin, the Archduke Basil had seemed of little avail in combating the arguments of the Russian Ambassador.

"Officials here deny that the alliance is intended in any way to embarrass Servia, or that they contemplate any hostile movement in that direction. Servia, however, has protested against the consummation of the treaty and though she has not sent Molbania anything in the nature of an ultima-

THE FACE OF THE KING

tum, it is significant that she has already begun mobilization under pretext of preparing for her Spring manoeuvres.

"Little can be learned here of the considerations which have led the King of Molbania to make this sudden change of front, and his reported willingness to sign the treaty comes as something of a surprise, since it was generally supposed in Vienna that he had decided against it."

Having perused this at his leisure, he slowly turned the pages until he came to that one which contained the column headed, "Amusements." Having located this, he folded the paper so that he might read it at his ease while he ate his breakfast, which a waiter had now brought and placed upon the table before him. He poured his coffee himself, waving away the boy who sought to do this service for him, and poured it without spilling a drop although his eyes were on the newspaper. Setting down the coffee pot, he ran his finger down the amusement column, pausing a moment here and there as he stopped to read, marking his

THE FACE OF THE KING

place with his finger-nail like a child. He passed two musical comedies without stopping, hesitated a little at one or two of the latest plays, but did not show any real interest until he came to the announcement of the Criterion Theatre which stated that William Wallace, the world-famous tragedian would appear for the last time this week in Shakespearian roles. The bill for the night was "Macbeth."

At this announcement the young man's finger-nail tarried for some time while his dark eyes ran over the advertisement slowly, word by word. Suddenly he lifted it, folded his paper briskly, swallowed what was left of his coffee, pulled out a card and a fountain pen. He wrote a few lines on the card and handed it to the waiter.

"Tell him to send them up to my room at six-thirty," he directed the waiter, "and let him charge them to my account."

He signed the bill and rose in a leisurely

THE FACE OF THE KING

fashion, pausing to light a cigarette before he sauntered toward the exit. As he passed the table where Mrs. Throckmorton and her daughter sat, he glanced for a moment at the girl's pretty brown-haired head bent over her newspaper, and though he gave no sign that he had observed it, he was keenly aware of the interested scrutiny of her mother. He was used to being gazed at in this way by interested mammas, and it was not entirely unknown to him to have the daughters show a little interest upon their own account. He was not, however, altogether prepared for what followed. For while he was passing, the waiter whom Mrs. Throckmorton had sent in search of information rapidly approached her table and leaning over her began,

"The gentleman you inquired about, Madam, —"

"Yes, yes!" Mrs. Throckmorton's eager tones came clearly to the ear of the gentleman in question.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"The gentleman who is just passing out, Madam, —"

"Is?"

"Is His Royal Highness—"

"His Royal Highness!" gasped Mrs. Throckmorton in ecstasy.

"His Royal Highness!" echoed her daughter.

"His Royal Highness," concluded the waiter, pausing as one who enjoyed the sensation he was about to create, "His Royal Highness, the Archduke Basil of Molbania!"

CHAPTER II.

I CONFESS I was somewhat relieved to read the dispatches from Vienna in the morning paper, for I had feared that my cousin would persist in his stubborn refusal to listen to reason and continue to procrastinate until I should be compelled to take some such step as that of which I spoke when I last talked with you. And that would not be easy."

The Archduke's pen slid rapidly over the paper, coming to an abrupt stop with the period as if that little black spheroid had been a natural obstacle already existing in its path, instead of its own creation. A short journey to the silver ink well upon the table and it resumed its task.

"And so, my dear Count Shenoffvitch, I trust that from now on all will go well with our

THE FACE OF THE KING

plans and that it will not be necessary for me to take any serious steps in the matter, though I assure you that, having given my word to you and to Ermin Pasha, I should never fail to carry out my part of the bargain. I have not had much hope that my cousin could be won over, for he has been, for a long time, a good deal under the influence of Bouloff, and to make matters worse, has fallen so madly in love with the pretty Marie-Louise, that he has been spending his time like a love-sick fool, writing her notes and sending her flowers, for all the world as though she were another man's wife, instead of the woman who is to become his own.

"I hope that no one has let drop a hint to him of the true purpose of this alliance, for though he has heard some of the rumors that are afloat and though Bouloff has openly charged you with intriguing with the ultimate aim of striking at our Northern neighbor, I do not believe that His Majesty has put much

THE FACE OF THE KING

dependence either upon the talk of the clubs or upon the apprehensions of the Russian. He has put the one down to gossip and the other he has ascribed to the natural timidity of great nations. For his own part, his unwillingness to sign, so far at least, has been due more to his dislike of allying Molbania with any great power — no matter what — since he naturally feels that such alliances between great and small nations generally turn out to be for the benefit of the former and not infrequently end in the extinction of the latter.

“All this he has told me time and again, but never, at any time, has he intimated that he suspected the truth of the common gossip or that he suspected my own interest in the affair. I charge you, therefore, and Ermin Pasha also, to tread cautiously and run no risks.

“Felicitating you upon the apparently suc-

THE FACE OF THE KING

cessful outcome of your mission in Molbania,
believe me, my dear Schenoffvich,

Your friend,

BASIL PULASKY."

The Archduke folded his letter, slipped it into an envelope and then into his pocket. Such letters as this are best mailed by one's own hands. Picking up the blotter, he tore it into small bits and dropped it, not in the waste-basket, but on the hearth, where a cheerful coal fire was filling the room with warmth and cheer in comfortable contrast to the storm and sleet of the December night without.

Having disposed of this, he rang for his valet.

"Have you ordered my car for eight o'clock?" he inquired when the man appeared.

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Then, that will do for this evening. I shall not want you again tonight."

"Very good, Your Highness. Thank you, Your Highness."

THE FACE OF THE KING

When the servant had left the room, the Archduke stood for a few moments looking into the flames of the fireplace, as though he hoped to find there the solution of the problem which he was turning over and over in his mind. The dispatch from Vienna had truly relieved him of a good deal of responsibility and had smoothed the path of those who hoped to make a catspaw of Molbania for the benefit of Austria. Just what Turkey's stake in the matter might be, he did not certainly know, but he knew the Sick Man of the East too well to suppose that Ermin Pasha was lending his influence to Austria for nothing. Possibly Turkey hoped that she would be given a slice of the Servian territory when the final partition should come, or possibly she had her eye upon Molbania itself; but whatever her hopes might be, the one thing certain was that Molbania would suffer. Turkey and Austria might be content with making a battle-ground of her and leaving her a sort

THE FACE OF THE KING

of second Belgium, or Austria might go further and, upon some pretext or other, maintain a permanent army in her territory.

He had, he told himself, no desire to see his country treated in this fashion for, though he was not likely to become the ruler of Molbania with his cousin married; yet, there was a chance. He shrugged his shoulders. Time enough to worry over such things when Austria had shown her hand. The important thing was to collect the money which was to be paid him. If he could hoodwink one party, he would have no more difficulty in hoodwinking the other when the necessity arose. Let those who teach chicanery look to their own interests lest their pupils apply their lessons where they learned them.

And so he stood, looking into the fire. But what he saw there was not the armies of Austria marching over the territory of Molbania to make war upon the Turks; not the fierce Serbs in their goatskin coats seeking re-

THE FACE OF THE KING

observed this, but she was also too American to be able to altogether shake off her awe of a high-sounding title. Much might be forgiven a man who had the right to inscribe Baron before his name. Much — but not everything. There had been one who had attempted to make love to her upon the strength of her mother's encouragement of his attentions. He returned to his own country swearing that all American girls were born savages who acquired neither taste nor manners until they were old enough to have grown-up daughters of their own.

"He looks so young," said Emily, "to be such an important person in international politics. The newspapers say that outside of the court, with the exception of the King himself, the Archduke is the most powerful and the most influential man in the whole of Molbania, though, to be sure, that isn't such a very large country when it comes to that. But he is a man of influence in Austria too, and

THE FACE OF THE KING

is known in all of the European capitals as a man to be reckoned with in straightening out the Balkan tangle."

"And you say he isn't married?" asked her mother.

"The papers say not," Emily answered, "though of course it is possible they would not know."

"Oh, yes, they would!" returned Mrs. Throckmorton with emphasis, "Trust them to know it. Just see how much they knew about our affairs when your father died. It's a pity they couldn't attend to their own affairs now and then. If he's been married they'd know it."

"Yes, I suppose they would, since he is heir presumptive."

"But he won't be heir presumptive long if the King marries," said her mother. "And when he isn't, he can marry anyone he wishes, whether she has royal blood or not," she added happily as the curtain rose.

THE FACE OF THE KING

William Wallace was of the old school. Despite the decadence of the Shakespearean drama, he had clung to the ancient traditions of his profession and scorned to adopt a more popular vehicle for his art. In his mind, tragedy and dignity were inseparable. He had neither admiration nor tolerance for the exponents of the modern drama and he held himself aloof from the other popular actors of the day, as one who felt himself, if not above his calling, at least superior to his fellows. He owned no rivals and he brooked no rivalry in his own company. It was the fixed rule in the William Wallace organization that the name of William Wallace should stand for the entire company and that no minor character, nor even chief supports, should in any way infringe upon his applause. This was well understood by his actors, and forgiven by them for such was his reputation that to have acted with him was a certificate of ability. To say, "I was for two years with William

THE FACE OF THE KING

Wallace," was like saying "I was for two years with Booth." And in spite of his out-of-date ideals, William Wallace continued to hold his place in the hearts of the theatre-goers. Other actors might lose thousands of pounds upon Shakespearean revivals, but Wallace never lost. His performances were invariably well-attended and his press notices were uniformly good. Whether it was because the people and the press felt a certain pity for this fine example of devotion to old-time ideals, or whether it was because William Wallace had become a tradition, it was impossible to say. Yet, for all his popularity and his reputation, he was by no means an old man. He had entered the profession in his early youth, and now, at the age of thirty-five, he was an institution.

It was the knowledge of these facts which had led the Archduke to select the Criterion as the scene of his evening's entertainment. Basil Pulasky, coming as he did, from a coun-

THE FACE OF THE KING

try which was still almost mediæval, had no real sympathy with the commercial tendencies of Western Europe. He despised traffic and barter, and in his mind there was no occupation fit for a gentleman but that of statescraft and soldiering. Artists — and actors — he tolerated as being necessary to the happiness of the great ones of the earth in need of relaxation and amusement. Comedians, however, made no appeal to him. He found his amusement in the contemplation of the stronger emotions, whether real or simulated. He would have been bored at a musical comedy and his dignity would not permit him to attend the motion pictures or any of the very light forms of entertainment. He waited, rather impatiently, for the appearance of the star.

The appearance of Wallace was the signal for a storm of applause, such as is seldom evoked by tragedians in these days. The house echoed and reechoed with spontaneous

THE FACE OF THE KING

hand-clapping which must have been as music in the ears of the star, accustomed though he was to enthusiastic receptions. But if his appearance caused a stir throughout the audience, it had something more than a passing effect upon the Archduke. His usually impassive face plainly showed surprise—almost astonishment. He turned, first pale and then red, as the blood rushed to his brain and set it whirling at a fearful pace. One seated near him might have heard him murmur, "All but the face—if only the face were the same—but an actor! It is worth remembering."

As the performance progressed he regained his composure, but his eyes never left the figure of Wallace, from the time he conversed with the witches until he met with his end at the hands of MacDuff. He returned to the Ritz with his mind still full of his discovery.

As he entered the lobby he was seen by the mail clerk who sent a bellboy to intercept him upon his way to the café. The boy held in

THE FACE OF THE KING

his hand a long blue envelope which he presented upon a small silver salver, magically produced from his coat pocket.

"A telegram, Your Highness, which has just this moment been received."

The Archduke took the telegram with one hand, tipped the boy with the other, and sank into one of the arm-chairs in the corridor. It was the work of a second to tear open the envelope and read the message within, which was short:

"His Highness, The Archduke Basil of Molbania, Ritz-Carlton, London.

"Our friend, whom you know, now flatly refuses to write a certain letter of which we have spoken. It is now your duty to do your part.

Ermin Pasha."

The muscles of the Archduke's jaw were set in rigid lines as he thrust the telegram into his pocket and rapidly walked to the desk.

"Can you tell me, if by any chance, William Wallace, the actor, is stopping here?"

THE FACE OF THE KING

"No, Your Highness, he is at the Savoy," returned the clerk, "But if you wish to see him this evening, it happens that he is at supper with an American lady—a Mrs. Peter Delancey Throckmorton who is stopping in the house."

"Page him," said the Archduke briefly, drawing out a card and writing upon it:

"His Highness, the Archduke Basil of Moldavia, presents his compliments to Mr. William Wallace, and begs that he may have the honor of a few moments' conversation in order that he may express his appreciation of the latter's art."

While waiting for the boy to return, he strode slowly up and down the corridor apparently absorbed in the contemplation of his exquisitely-polished evening boots. The boy was gone but a moment. He piloted the Archduke through the supper room to a table in the far corner, where Mrs. Throckmorton and her daughter were awaiting him with

THE FACE OF THE KING

eager anticipation and the actor with a self-satisfied expression, not uncommonly seen upon the faces of commoners who have attracted the attention of royalty or nobility.

The entire party rose at his approach and even the ladies remained standing until he waved his hand for them to be seated.

"I trust you will pardon this intrusion," he began, politely including the ladies in his address, "But the fact is, we so seldom see good acting in our little corner of the world, that an evening of such enjoyment as I have had tonight at the Criterion moves me to express my gratitude in person to the man who has made that enjoyment possible."

Wallace was obviously pleased with this flattery—a fondness for flattery being his greatest weakness, as is apt to be the case with those who depend upon applause for their reputations. Mrs. Throckmorton was charmed with his politeness — it would have made no difference to her what his words

THE FACE OF THE KING

might have been. She did not hear one word of what he said. If he had recited a Mother Goose rhyme, she would have been quite as well satisfied and quite as firmly convinced that his natural wit was equal to his exalted station. As for the pretty Emily, she too was charmed. Few girls would have been able to look on unmoved at such a handsome young man bearing such an illustrious title, and when such a young man addressed himself to her with the air of one who speaks with a lady of the court, it would take something more than ordinary indifference to keep her pulse steady.

There were, therefore, three hearts beating quickly while the little supper party talked of minor matters of the day and made conversation after the fashion of those who have just met for the first time. No,—there were four, and the fourth was the heart of the Archduke himself. In spite of his suave speeches and his untroubled countenance, there was a violent commotion within, but his pulse quickened

THE FACE OF THE KING

when he looked at the actor and so far as he was concerned the two women might have been at the bottom of the sea if they had not served as an excuse for his lingering to lead the conversation into the channels which best suited him.

It was after midnight when the Archduke finally rose to go.

"So glad to have met you, Your Highness," fluttered Mrs. Throckmorton. "It is just possible that we may have the pleasure of seeing you again within a few months. My daughter and I intend making a tour of the Balkans. We had hoped to visit your own delightfully interesting country three years ago, but owing to the war, we were unable to do so. This time we hope to have better luck. There is no truth, is there, in the rumor that there may be a war between Austria and Bulgaria?"

"Servia, Mamma," exclaimed her daughter hurriedly, fearing that her mother's blunders

THE FACE OF THE KING

would not stop there but would extend to something touching upon the Archduke's own country.

"No danger whatever, Madam," replied the Archduke smiling. "And I assure you that your welcome to Molbania will be of the warmest. You will enjoy, I am sure, your presentation at the court of King Rudolph, for while it is but a small court as European courts go, still there is much color and variety in our life there, and we have, perhaps, more picturesqueness to offer to the visitor than any of the other small nations."

"And you?" he added, turning to Wallace, his tone being that of an assertion rather than a question, "I shall have the happiness to see you also in Molbania within a short time."

"I fear not," said the actor. "My engagements preclude it. I am, in fact, under contract to tour the United States as soon as my engagement here is at an end."

"But I shall see you there, nevertheless," in-

THE FACE OF THE KING

sisted the Archduke. "And within the next six months."

"No," replied the actor positively. "There is no chance of it."

The Archduke smiled.

"I see you are a man who puts his dependence upon human plans and perishable documents," he replied. "Now I am one of those who believe in Fate, and it is my good fortune, unworthy though I am, to be able to see a little way into the times that are coming. You are not a sporting man, I take it, but perhaps you would be willing to make with me a little wager, by way of testing the relative strength of the stars of the constellation and the plans of mankind. Now it is my contention that the stars of the Thespian firmament are controlled completely by those of the heavens. And it is my belief that my own ability to judge of the future is sufficient to enable me to say with certainty that I shall see you in Molbania within the next six

THE FACE OF THE KING

months. For this reason, I propose to you a wager—I will wager you two thousand pounds against a like amount that you will be in Thetrograd before six months are gone.”

He picked up a menu card and scribbled on it, signing his name with something of a flourish, and handed it to Wallace.

“There,” said he, “is my promise to telegraph you the sum of two thousand pounds to your London bankers upon the twenty-fifth day of March if you are not in Molbania before that time. If you are there, I will collect from you, your forfeit.”

And bowing to the astonished party, he turned on his heel and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER III

IN the clear sunlight of a bright day in the early spring, the mountains of Molbania loomed blue in the distance, while those near-by, circling the city like so many natural fortifications, were faintly tinged with the green of the never-dying fir and pine trees, the taller peaks capped with crowns of snow. The picturesque little city of Thetrograd nestled in a cup-like valley, shut in from the outer world by range after range of these rugged hills, traversed only by wagon roads and the one lone finicular railway which wound its tortuous way up over the heights from the village of Lereburg, just over the Austrian border. There had been few changes in Thetrograd since the days of the first crusade, when her king, Nicholas the Brave, led the Molbanians

THE FACE OF THE KING

out against the infidels for the glory of God and the Christian race. True, there were now many cobble-stone pavements where the streets had formerly been bare; mere country roads in dry weather and seas of mud in the rainy season; true, also, there were the so-called Boulevards of St. Andrew and St. James—Boulevards by courtesy for the reason that they were paved with asphaltum. But, taking it as a whole, it was the same old city, devoid of street cars, electric light, telephones—except the government line—and possessing exactly thirty motor-cars. The houses of the townsfolk shouldered one another up and down the narrow lanes, hunching themselves ridiculously to make room for alleys and cross-streets, with here and there, the portly and hospitable front of an old-fashioned inn swinging its sign to the breeze and offering shelter to man and beast. Business blocks there were none. The little shops with their leaded panes and high stoops were over-shadowed by the

THE FACE OF THE KING

projecting upper stories and even the cafés—boasting a few tables and chairs upon the sidewalk in the Parisian fashion, resembled the old English coffee-houses in their solemn respectable fronts.

Castle Thanlis, so built that it was virtually a part of the ancient wall of the city of Thetrograd, thrust out its arms of masonry upon either side forcing back the straggling houses of the gentry to make room for its spacious and well-kept gardens, hidden from the sight of passersby by a twenty-foot wall with spiked railings on top.

These gardens were the favorite spot of the Princess Marie Louise of Thex-Schwegstein, temporarily domiciled in Castle Thanlis awaiting the celebration of her nuptials with the ruler of Molbania. Austrian as she was, she had the Teuton's deep love of flowers and all growing green things, so that she could walk for hours in this sheltered spot and find each hour a fresh enjoyment. But it was not the

THE FACE OF THE KING

sight of the flowers which drew her out of the castle this spring morning. It was not the scent of the roses which brought that fresh color to her cheek, nor the little buds just pushing their inquisitive noses through their shelter of green bark to learn if Spring had really come. It was the old oak tree by the gate which seemed to draw her steps down the graveled walk till she rested in the shadow of its still almost bare, but now awakening boughs.

Walking solemnly around the old oak, but with a slight smile curving her red lips, she thrust her hand within a hole in the trunk and drew out—to her great surprise—a tiny tree, roots and all, the exact replica of the big tree in whose trunk it had reposed. Attached to one of the miniature boughs was a letter. Opening this, she read:

“To Marie: With a Japanese Tree.

**“Do you believe in fairies, dear?
Or are your nursery tales forgot?**

THE FACE OF THE KING

Wise people tell you they are myths,
But, oh my dear, believe them not!

"This little tree from old Japan
In some sweet fairy garden grew,
And faries brought it overseas
That it might bear my love to you.

"And in your own sweet garden grow
And so remind you, day by day,
There is a way to Fairyland
For those who care to see the way.

"And that same fairy who at birth
Made you both beautiful and sweet,
Is waiting ever near at hand
To guide your hesitating feet

"Along that cherry-blossomed road
Which leads one straight to Arcady!
Will you not come with her, sweetheart,
To love—and happiness—and me?"

Her face shone with the soft light of love as
she refolded the letter and thrust it in her
bosom. Then taking the little tree she raced—
yes, literally raced—back to the castle, calling

THE FACE OF THE KING

out, "Ruprecht! Oh, Ruprecht!" As she rounded the corner of a summer house she stopped just in time to avoid a collision with Ruprecht himself, grizzle-headed and bent with years of service, but bearing his years with a dignity becoming one who has spent a life-time in the service of a reigning Princess.

"Oh, Ruprecht!" she cried, laughing. "Do you want to run over me? I never knew you to be so prompt before!"

A blush—the first that had stained his leathery cheek in many a year—crept up beneath his skin and dyed his face a brick-red. The truth was, Ruprecht had been doing something which he very much disliked to do and which he never would have done if he had not loved the Princess whom he served with the whole love of his heart. He had, in fact, for the first time in his life, been acting the part of the spy. A shrewd suspicion, born in the brain of the Baroness Von Houlburg, the duenna of the Princess, had set him to watch-

THE FACE OF THE KING

ing this morning in the gardens of Castle Thanlis. The Baroness, though not the most observing person in the world, had noticed that the Princess did not press her to accompany her upon these early morning walks in the gardens, and, being a woman of action, she confided her suspicions to Ruprecht, who resented any insinuation that his Princess could stoop to a flirtation so short a time before her marriage with the King, yet he admitted the wisdom of the Baroness's remark that "one never can be too careful where a young girl is concerned." He had, therefore, undertaken to see what had drawn the Princess out so early. Being somewhat stiff in the knees, he had not been able to follow closely upon her heels, and, when she called him, forgetting for the moment what had brought him there, he obeyed instinctively the impulse to answer that summons in person—an instinct which was the result of the habit of years.

"Your Highness' pardon!" he begged shame-

THE FACE OF THE KING

facedly. "I came out to get a little of the air, I cannot bear the dampness of these mountain castles, so I——" His voice trailed away, but the Princess was already occupied with her own thoughts and paying no attention to his explanation, so he spared himself the trouble of going into details.

"See, Ruprecht!" She held up the little tree for him to look at. "You must get a spade at once and dig a hole for me to plant it in."

"Herr Gott!" exclaimed the astonished Ruprecht, startled out of his respect for his mistress. "Does it grow?"

"Of course it grows, stupid. It is only that it is small—they make them so in Japan—I suppose it is a little country, and I have seen them in Vienna."

"Little country!" echoed Ruprecht. "So I should judge, Your Highness. A country that has room for no larger trees than that must be infinitesimal; Thex-Schwegstein were an empire beside it! I suppose they carry there their

THE FACE OF THE KING

horses in their pockets!" And he went off chuckling, in the way of old people, at his own joke.

When he had returned with the spade and hollowed out the hole, the Princess set to work with her own hands planting the little tree. Ruprecht stood idly by.

"Bless her innocent heart!" he said to himself. "The idea of suspecting a girl like that. She is like a child."

But suddenly a disquieting thought came to him. Where did she get that tree? He did not dare ask her and he could not guess.

"Run along now, Ruprecht," said the Princess. "I don't need you any more. Go in and ask the Baroness if she is ready for our morning drive. I shall be there in a moment."

"If Your Highness pleases, the Baroness will not go to drive this morning. She has a slight indisposition—a—a headache. So I will remain with you to carry in the spade."

THE FACE OF THE KING

The Princess frowned, but her head was bent so that he did not see it.

"Very well," she said shortly. "If you prefer it so."

When she had completed her task she preceded him up the path toward the castle, but, pausing upon the pretense of plucking up a weed, she bade him go on, and, running back, pressed a kiss on the boughs of the little tree. When he turned at the entrance to the castle, he found the Princess directly behind him, breathless and with her eyes shining.

If the gardens of Castle Thanlis were beautiful by day, how much more beautiful they were by moonlight! Princess Marie-Louise found them so, at least, as she slipped down the garden path, fearful lest the moonlight betray her, yet blessing it for the air of romance which it lent to her meeting with her beloved.

"How glad I am," she thought, "that mine has not been a stupid state courtship without love and without romance! I could not bear

THE FACE OF THE KING

to marry a man as though I were appointing a Prime Minister. Oh, how glad I am that Rudolph is a real man with youth in his heart—and poetry—and love!”

No one could accuse the Princess Marie-Louise of being sentimental in the ordinary sense, but she had the normal longing for her romance—rightfully hers—which is to be found in every woman worth the winning. She might have married Rudolph without a personal courtship, but, had she done so, she could never have loved him; for their love would then have been a matter of convenience, a make-shift, little better than making the best of things. As it was, he was as romantic as she, and a poet to boot. What more could any girl ask of her suitor than that he be a King, an honest wooer and an ardent swain?

These things were passing through her mind as she stood in the shadow of the oak.

Then suddenly a man's head appeared above the wall. He slowly drew himself up, lifted

THE FACE OF THE KING

out two of the spikes, which had been conveniently loosened, and swung his legs over. He then pulled up a rope which he had thrown over one of the solid spikes and with this he let himself down into the garden.

"Welcome, Romeo!" she meant to say. But instead she said, "My love! my love!" and his arms closed around her. A romantic courtship begun with an air of jesting had suddenly become the real thing, and they were both as much in earnest as the young people of Verona whom they imitated.

There was silence in the garden for a moment. Then Marie-Louise whispered, "Come! I have something to show you." She took his hand and led him to the spot where she had planted the tree.

Again his arms enfolded her. "Did you like it?" he asked.

"Like it! I loved it! And I loved the verses, too. Sometimes I think you are a better poet than you are a King!"

THE FACE OF THE KING

"That is only natural," he replied soberly. "It is more in my nature to write poems than to direct a kingdom. I fear I am a pretty poor sort of monarch——" He sighed slightly. "For I have not the decision a king should have."

"No, no!" she cried, placing a soft hand over his mouth. "You mustn't say it! And I didn't mean it. You are a good King—the best King this country ever had!"

"But I hesitate," he said. "I do not make up my mind. I put off my decisions, and what seems to me today the best thing I could do, tomorrow seems the most foolish."

"That is because you are judicious, and you think before you act. But I can see that you are worried. Tell me, dearest, what is troubling you? Is it that you are so soon to be burdened with a wife?"

His kiss was his only protest. After a moment he released her and said: "I am worried, I confess, about the Austrian treaty. I

THE FACE OF THE KING

have been procrastinating because I could not be certain what seemed best for the country. Bouloff declares that to sign the treaty will mean that Austria will declare war upon Servia. If I believed that true, I should let my hand wither before I would sign it. But it cannot be true. Bouloff is misled by his superiors in Russia. Ermin Pasha is equally certain that without such a treaty Molbania will be attacked by Servia and Bulgaria or swallowed up by Russia. The Archduke says——”

“That man! I will not listen!” She covered her ears with her hands. “I do not see why you continue to put your dependence upon him. I am sure that he has not your good at heart. I wish you would not act upon his advice.”

“But why do you dislike him so, my love?”

“Because I do not trust him.”

The King laughed tolerantly.

“The old Molbanian proverb,” said he, “says ‘trust no man but a dead man,’ but I am afraid



THE FACE OF THE KING

that no dead man can advise us how to decide in this instance."

"I am not so sure of that," she said quickly. "Have you forgotten your history—the history of your own country? Don't you remember how in the Crimean war your grandfather was asked to make an alliance with Turkey and how he refused? Molbania was saved by that decision, and what better advice can you get than that which saved a kingdom?"

The King drew in his breath sharply.

"I believe you are right," he said. "I will take the advice of my grandfather — and my sweetheart—and tomorrow I will tell them that I have made up my mind once and for all. But, truly, you do Basil injustice. He does not feel toward you as you do toward him."

The Princess knew this only too well, but she did not wish to trouble further the King's already troubled mind, so she said nothing.

"He has been thinking of your pleasure,"

THE FACE OF THE KING

the King continued. "Only today he was planning something for you."

"In what way?"

"Why, he was telling me that we ought to have something beside the balls and receptions for your amusement. You must find Thetrograd stupid—you who are used to the gayeties of Vienna."

"Indeed, I do not!" protested the Princess, pressing his arm.

"He suggested that we ought to have something worth while at the National Theatre—you know we never have—and he suggested that I send for a certain actor of his acquaintance to give a series of performances here during the week before our marriage."

The Princess pouted. "I don't care about plays," she said.

"Oh, but you would care about these," said the King. "This actor is famous and they say his acting is simply wonderful. I am sure you would enjoy it."

THE FACE OF THE KING

"I don't think I would enjoy anything the Archduke suggested," said Marie Louise. "I don't like his suggestions and I don't like his plans. I have a feeling that he means you no good in anything he suggests. Please don't do anything he asks."

The King laughed lightly.

"You absurd child," he said, tenderly patting her cheek. "You must not let your anxiety for my welfare deprive you of a real treat. This actor is well worth seeing any time. Basil tells me that if necessary he himself would travel across Europe to see him."

"What is the name of this wonderful actor?" the Princess said scornfully.

"He is an English tragedian," said the King, "and his name is William Wallace."

CHAPTER IV

I TRUST that you have satisfactorily arranged the little affair of which we have spoken?"

Ermin Pasha's eyebrows shot upward interrogatively.

The Archduke continued to gaze out of the window. He had a feeling that the Turk could read his mind if he were permitted to look into his eyes.

"And our—English friend—he falls in with your plans?"

Ermin Pasha approached everything from the side; there was something almost crab-like in his method of conversing. He never came directly to the point, and yet he managed to make himself understood. The Archduke lighted a cigarette—not because he wanted to

THE FACE OF THE KING

smoke, but because he wanted time to think. Presently he said with some deliberation,

"He will give no trouble on that score."

"But your obstinate friend himself, the King—does he suspect your motives?"

"Why should he, since they are of the best?"

The Turk smiled at this shot.

"Why, indeed?" he replied smoothly.

"And you," suddenly began the Archduke.

"Have you spoken to your friend, the Austrian, in regard to the compensation for that little matter which I have agreed to arrange for him?"

"Assuredly. He agrees to the terms which you proposed."

"That is to say?"

"The Hungarian title and estates and the support of His—that is, of my Austrian friend in case of need."

The Archduke drummed with his fingers on the table.

"You have Schenoffvitch's word for this?"

THE FACE OF THE KING

"I have his letter, written in Vienna, less than a week ago."

Ermin Pasha thrust his hand in his pocket—and drew it out again. "I am afraid I have left that letter in my *escritoire*."

The Archduke smiled.

"You do not show your fear," he said.

"I thank you. A soldier can know no higher compliment."

"I trust you have the key to this convenient bit of furniture. I should not like to have this letter fall into the hands of anyone for whom it was not intended; into the hands of, well, Bouloff, for instance."

Ermin Pasha bent over the table and folded his arms across his breast. There was a slight crackling in his tunic.

"I can assure you that there is no danger of that."

"And the compensation for our friend, the Englishman?"

"I have been thinking of that," said Ermin

THE FACE OF THE KING

Pasha. He added after a pause: "It has occurred to me that he could hardly be expected to ask for his compensation in advance?"

"Naturally not."

"And it has occurred to me also that when he has accomplished what we have set him to do, it would be a waste of money to pay him."

"You mean?"

"I mean that his would be an unlikely story."

"The story that he had——"

"Exactly. It is difficult to persuade people that a man has been absent when they have seen him every day. It is more difficult to persuade them that they cannot believe their eyes in a case of this kind. Without evidence, without witnesses, what could be proved? And even if it were, who would dare openly to make such a charge when it would be to convict himself?"

THE FACE OF THE KING

Something like admiration dawned in the eyes of the Archduke.

"You are not only a good soldier," he said. "You are also a wise merchant—you do not pay for goods that have gone stale."

The Turk bowed. "I thank you," said he. "In my country to be called a wise merchant is equivalent to being called a wise man, and merchant is an honorable title among us also."

"In my own case, however," continued the Archduke, "I think I should prefer to be called a wise lawyer; one, you understand, who does no business until he has received his retainer."

Ermin Pasha rubbed his nose with one long, tapering finger.

"It might be arranged," he conceded at last. "The Hungarian title."

"And the estates," said the Archduke with emphasis.

"Ah, the estates! I fear that could not be so easily arranged. You see, my friend, a title may be conferred for something or noth-

THE FACE OF THE KING

ing—because it is the whim of the ruler, because the man so honored is a man eminent elsewhere—because he can play the violin, because he makes good beer. But estates—one does not confer estates for nothing. So when people see that an estate has been conferred upon such and such a one, they say—for what? What has he done to earn this? And if they cannot find the answer to that, they say, what has he promised to do?”

“They need not know it.”

“But there is always the danger that they will know it. Our friend, the Russian, has means of learning many things.”

“There can be no scandal in conferring an estate upon the heir presumptive of a neighboring kingdom.”

“But, my friend, you may not be the heir presumptive a year from now.”

“No,” said the Archduke smiling. “But I should not mind that so much if I were a Hungarian Prince.”

THE FACE OF THE KING

The Turk shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands.

"And they say the Molbanian's besetting sin is his lack of thrift!" he exclaimed, smiling humorously at the ceiling.

"As heir presumptive, it is my duty to correct that fault."

Ermin Pasha became suddenly serious.

"That is the second time in our conversation that Your Highness has mentioned succession. I trust there is nothing in your mind relating to our friend, the obstinate one, which is not contemplated in our agreement?"

"Nothing of the sort you have in mind, Your Excellency. The Pulaskys are not regicides. No Carogevitch blood runs in our veins."

"Ah!" said the Turk with a sigh of relief. "I had nothing so serious in mind." His ear, trained in long years of diplomatic discourse, told him that the Archduke, this time, at least, had spoken the truth.

"You are satisfied," he asked, "that your

THE FACE OF THE KING

friend, the Englishman, will be able to carry off his part?"

"If I were as sure of my Hungarian estate as I am of his ability, I should count myself a Hungarian at this moment."

"But will he not be frequently at a loss for detailed information which he might be expected to know?"

"As, for instance?"

"As, for instance, conversations which have passed between himself and a certain lady."

"There is no need for embarrassment upon that score. Man is a fickle animal. Tastes change and lovers grow cold. He can avoid the dangerous tête-a-tête."

"And if she will not be put off?"

"He can make love to her. When a woman asks a man a question, he has three courses open to him: he can tell the truth, he can tell her a lie, or he can tell her that he loves her."

"And which course would Your Highness ordinarily recommend?"

THE FACE OF THE KING

"Ordinarily and always, I would recommend the third course. The truth does not agree with women, and to lie to a woman is not the act of a gentleman. But to tell a woman that you love her is what she expects, what she demands, and the only thing which really satisfies her."

Ermin Pasha showed his white teeth.

"You should have been one of us," he said. "To waste such wisdom on one woman is to rob the sex."

"You flatter me," said the Archduke enigmatically.

He rose and took up his hat.

Ermin Pasha accompanied him to the door.

"And when does our obstinate friend go upon his vacation?" he asked, his hand upon the hangings.

"On the night of the Grand Ball," said the Archduke.

CHAPTER V

CLAD in the uniform of a Colonel of the Molbanian Hussars, the Archduke Basil was a sight to gladden the eyes of any young and impressionable girl, as he bowed over the hand of Miss Emily Throckmorton, an American girl who had recently been presented at court, upon the night of the Grand Ball. He was young, he was handsome, he was gay; and the golden double-headed eagle of the Order of the Black Mountain suspended from his neck by a ribbon did not detract from his distinguished appearance. Doubtless Miss Throckmorton would have been duly impressed had she been intent upon the gorgeous gentleman before her, but her eyes were elsewhere. The Archduke, unused to such lack of attention, stole a glance over

THE FACE OF THE KING

his shoulder and observed the cause of her abstraction in the person of Count Paul Bouloff, the Russian Ambassador.

"Ah," he said with a slight sneer, "I see that there is no truth in the report that His Excellency, the Russian Ambassador, is indisposed and unable to leave the Legation."

"I was not aware," the girl returned somewhat stiffly, "that there was any report to that effect. Indeed, I can scarcely conceive how such a report could gain currency, since His Excellency called upon me at the Hotel Dijon this afternoon and drove through St. James Boulevard, both going and coming."

"It was no doubt the idle chatter of servants," responded the Archduke easily, "based perhaps upon the past disposition of His Excellency to fall ill upon occasions such as this. The rumor was, perhaps, a trifle premature."

With which Parthian shot he passed on, leaving Miss Throckmorton sorely troubled in her mind. Two weeks of life in the little Mol-

THE FACE OF THE KING

banian capital had given rise to certain prejudices in her estimate of the people about her. It was not unnatural that she should have conceived a dislike for the Archduke in the beginning, for she was quite in the habit of disliking those eligible young men who appealed most strongly to her mother. Like any spirited young woman she resented the thought that she was simply so much goods upon the marriage market and vastly preferred picking out a man to suit her own tastes, even though he fall a little short of her mamma's ideals in the matter of high station and wordly wealth. She had first been attracted to the Russian, not so much because of his appearance or address, but because she knew him for the enemy of the man whom she felt her mother was certain to try to force upon her. She had accepted his invitation to ride and drive upon the narrow lanes in and about the capital chiefly because she wished to be spared the company of Pulasky. But it was not long before she began

THE FACE OF THE KING

to take an interest in Bouloff upon his own account. He was not the gallant dashing soldier that the other was, but he was genuine, and he had an honorable record in the Russian army to his credit. Unusually modest for a man of his position and importance, he had appealed to her the more strongly because of the contrast he presented to the swaggering gasconading officers of this petty court. Moreover, he was a friend of the King, and she, knowing nothing of the secret understanding of romance between the King and the Princess, sympathized with both as two unfortunate young people who were being married to one another without having anything to say in the matter, and just for state reasons.

Count Bouloff found her in a quiet mood when he had finally worked his way about the ballroom, and unobtrusively forced a passage through a group of petty officers who perfunctorily requested the honor of her company in a dance and, being refused upon the ground

THE FACE OF THE KING

that her card was filled, swore that they were desolated and that the whole evening's entertainment was spoiled so far as they were concerned.

As she danced with the Russian she found herself following the Princess with her eyes, wondering at the look of happiness which that young woman wore and wondering that any girl about to be married to a man whom she had known but a few short weeks should look so well content. Then suddenly recalling the fact that her own acquaintance with Bouloff had been of an even shorter tenure, she looked up at him and blushed, to his evident delight.

The Princess was indeed happy that evening, and beautiful; her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks flushed, for this ball was the occasion of the official announcement of her betrothal to the King, and was to be followed by their nuptials within a very short time. Her lover had promised her that he would do nothing likely to involve his country in trouble

THE FACE OF THE KING

with Russia nor to lend himself in any way to the plans of the Austrians or Turks. On these matters she had been much concerned. The only cloud upon her horizon was the presence of the marvelous actor, William Wallace, whom she was forced to acknowledge a consummate artist, but whom she disliked simply because he had come to Thetrograd upon the suggestion of the Archduke. Wallace, however, was leaving Thetrograd with his company early the next morning, and, as nothing untoward had occurred during his stay in the capital, she was now content to believe that her suspicions of Pulasky's motives in inviting him there were, after all, quite unfounded.

She was, moreover, happy in the knowledge that the King would seek her in the garden of Castle Thanlis as soon as the evening's festivities were over, and that there, under the old oak tree, they would exchange for the thousandth time the vows which grew more sweet with each repeating. Was there ever a Prin-

THE FACE OF THE KING

cess so blessed as she? Romance and a kingdom were her lot.

She smiled pleasantly at the American girl as she passed and thereby won the heart of the young woman who, but a moment before, had been ready to criticise her lack of romanticism.

She smiled also at the Archduke, and, though it was the grudging smile which convention wrings from the unwilling, it set his pulse beating and strengthened his determination to carry out the plans which he had laid for this night. He was standing quite still, looking after her, when he felt a hand on his arm and, turning abruptly, he found himself looking into the keen eyes of Ermin Pasha.

"Ah, my friend," said the Turk, smiling. "We have a proverb in our country: 'There is a time to think of all things, and the time to think of women is when one has nothing else to think of!'"

The Archduke's eyes blazed with anger, but

THE FACE OF THE KING

he controlled his voice and answered in a steady tone:

“And we, in Molbania, have a proverb, also: ‘There is a time to speak of all things, but the time to speak of a woman never comes—among gentlemen.’ ”

Ermin Pasha flushed, but kept his temper. Neither of these men could afford to quarrel with the other, and each knew it.

“So, we are quits,” he said politely. “I have been seeking you all evening. I understand that it has been given out that our English friend is to leave us on the morrow. I trust that all has gone well between you and that he has agreed to the plan?”

“He has; though not so readily as I had hoped. I appealed to his cupidity in vain, but succeeded admirably in appealing to his vanity. I drew for him a picture of himself in the rôle which we have selected for him and finally convinced him that it was the rarest oppor-

THE FACE OF THE KING

tunity ever offered a man of his profession to display his genuine talent."

"And you are still quite certain that he will be able to carry it off?"

"Positive, my dear Pasha, and now that I have seen him act again I am more confident than ever that he will deceive everyone."

"So! Then I will leave you for the time being. It is best that we should not be seen much together tonight in case all should not go as we have planned."

"There can be no danger of that," replied the Archduke, "for I have attended to everything. Schenoffvitch is to be here in a few moments and will assist me in the other part of the undertaking. He is to bring with him a few of his own men, since mine could not be relied upon for this. Meanwhile, let your mind be at rest." He bowed casually and moved off in the direction of the supper room.

Emily Throckmorton, seated in the conservatory, where she was awaiting the return

THE FACE OF THE KING

of Bouloff, sent in search of punch, saw the Archduke approaching, with a feeling of uneasiness. She had hoped that her conversation with the Russian would not be interrupted, and, of all the people present at the ball, she least wished to have the Archduke intrude upon her prospective tête-a-tête. She drew back in the shadow of the palms, hoping that he would pass the door of the conservatory without seeing her. Her precautions were not in vain, for he was passing, oblivious of her proximity, when he suddenly stopped and said in a low tone: "Ah, my dear Wallace, you are the very man I wished to see. I have brought you that souvenir which you asked me to secure for you."

Curiosity overcoming her fear of discovery, Miss Throckmorton peered through the foliage just in time to see the Archduke draw something from his pocket and pass it to the actor. Wallace, who held a cigarette in his right hand, attempted to shift the cigarette and grasp the

THE FACE OF THE KING

proffered object with one hand, fumbling it and dropping it upon the floor. In a moment he had stooped and recovered it, but in that moment Emily had seen what it was. It was a photograph of His Majesty, King Rudolph of Molbania.

CHAPTER VI

ONCE again the Princess Marie-Louise of Thex-Schwegstein came down the path in the gardens of Castle Thanlis to meet her lover. But this time she looked nervously over her shoulder and proceeded cautiously, for there was no moon this night, and these gardens held many dark corners where an intruder might lurk and spring out upon an unprotected young woman. True, there was the great wall, but, if that did not serve to keep out her sweetheart, it might not prove an insuperable barrier to one less welcome than he. In a moment more she would be under the old oak, where she would feel comparatively safe, for to her it was surrounded with the atmosphere of the King, and, even though

THE FACE OF THE KING

he be not there in person, she felt that he must be there in spirit, watching over her.

But it was not alone the fear of robbers and footpads which caused her to cast apprehensive glances at the shadows which lay along the path behind her; the Baroness Von Houlburg had lately taken to following her about and keeping a close eye upon her. She feared that this amiable but over-zealous guardian of her welfare might note her absense from the castle and follow her to the trysting place, thus bringing to a banal termination her romantic courtship. To be discovered thus seeking in secrecy the companionship which she could so easily have had in the eyes of her whole world would render both herself and her future husband ridiculous. She had no desire for such a denouement, and was determined to guard her innocent secret at all hazards.

She did not, therefore, keep always to the path, but stepped aside from the beaten track here and there, to crouch for a moment behind

THE FACE OF THE KING

some bush or tree as though she would play at hide-and-seek with her shadow. In spite of her fear—nay, because of it—she enjoyed this perilous passage from the entrance of the castle to the appointed spot. It needed but this thrilling sense of pursuit and espionage to make her romance perfect. The King was the ideal lover, always eager, never assuming those proprietary airs which have brought so many courtships to an untimely end, and coming always to their clandestine meetings as though each one were the first. Adding to this knowledge the suspicion that her movements were being watched and that she must exercise the greatest care to keep them from becoming known, filled to the brim the cup of her enjoyment. She had never hoped, as a Princess, to enjoy these delicious transports of terror which swept over her when she heard a branch creak or a bush rustle—in the wrong direction.

For all her divagations, she reached the oak at last and settled down to wait the coming

THE FACE OF THE KING

of her lover. She knew that he would not be long if he were not stopped by some stupid dignitary of the court anxious to discuss state affairs with an impatient and absent-minded monarch. Nor was she wrong in this, for she had scarcely seated herself upon the little bench beneath the oak, when the King's head rose above the wall. Silhouette though it was, she would have known it among all the heads in the world, kingly or otherwise. As he dropped to the ground, she rose to greet him.

"Hist!" she warned him in a whisper, feeling delightfully like a conspirator. "Be very quiet. I am afraid that I may be followed."

"Followed?" echoed the King as he drew her closely to him and in a whisper which he strove to make as soft as possible, but which could have been heard a good ten feet. "By whom?"

"The Baroness," she answered. "She has been my shadow for the past ten days. She suspects that I do not walk in the garden in

THE FACE OF THE KING

the early morning for nothing, and she has set poor old Ruprecht to spying upon me.

“Poor Ruprecht! He hates it, but he does not know that I know what he is doing. He was never cut out for the secret service—his espionage is so obvious!”

The King laughed softly. “It is easy to see that he will never make a Molbanian. Here intrigue comes as naturally to the peasant as to the nobleman. A people who live surrounded by enemies naturally grow sharp of ear and eye—” he sighed slightly— “and God knows Molbania has enemies and to spare!”

The Princess placed her soft palm upon his forehead and rubbed energetically. She stepped back and observed him critically with her head on one side.

“There!” she announced with a satisfied air. “The frown is all gone—aren’t you ashamed to look so unhappy when you come to see me? It is a poor compliment you pay me, sir. Now, don’t let me hear another word about state

THE FACE OF THE KING

affairs tonight. We have only ten minutes before I must go back to the castle. Tonight, I cannot stay—I will be missed—besides, it is late.” She tossed her head back, shaking loose some of her pretty curls.

“Ten minutes!” echoed the King in consternation. “Ten minutes—after twenty-four hours of waiting! You cannot mean it. You are teasing me!”

“Indeed, I am not,” the girl replied. She spoke firmly, but she clung to his shoulder. “In ten minutes the Baroness will have wakened from her nap before the fire and will be ready for bed. She will not go until she has seen me safely in my own room and has personally inspected every lock and bolt in Castle Thanlis. She would have made an excellent jailor—except for the fact that she is kind-hearted,” she added contritely.

“Let us sit down then,” said the King, drawing her down beside him on the bench beneath the oak. “I would like to see you longer, dear.”

THE FACE OF THE KING

She leaned upon him, her eyes shining.

"Greedy!" she chided playfully. "You have already taken so much of my time that I fear I shall not be ready for our wedding."

She spoke the last word softly—almost reverently.

"Do you realize, Rudolph, that in only a short time I shall be your wife and that then there will be no more need for meetings such as this?"

The King caught the wistful note in her voice.

"Nonsense," he replied. "There will be all the more need for them. If husbands and wives were only wise enough to realize it, there would be more happy marriages.

"Do you think because I have a wife I mean to lose my sweetheart? We will meet here then as now; here under the oak, where no one will be standing by to listen, and you shall help me to decide what is best for my people—for our people."

THE FACE OF THE KING

"Our people!" she echoed happily. "It will be 'our' everything then, will it not? Oh, Rudolph, you are so good."

Suddenly the ears of the Princess caught the sound of Ruprecht's cautious step upon the gravel walk. Ruprecht, whose tread ordinarily resembled that of a cart-horse, had softened his footfall until it was scarcely audible, but the Princess' ears, alert for this very sound, detected it before the clumsy servitor had progressed fifteen feet along the path.

She sprang up from the bench.

"You must go at once!" she whispered to Rudolph. "He will be here in a moment and he will see you if you do not hurry!"

"What does it matter?" demanded her lover, taking her again in his arms. "There is nothing wrong in our meeting here; what harm if he does see me?"

Princess Marie Louise of Thex-Schwegstein stamped her foot.

"Don't be stupid, Rudolph! Of course it

THE FACE OF THE KING

matters. It would spoil everything. Do you suppose I want the whole court chattering and calling us a pair of romantic young simpletons? If you love me, go at once!"

"If I love you!" The King snatched another hasty kiss and in a moment more he was at the top of the wall.

"What else are we?" he called back softly, with a mischievous chuckle. Without waiting for her answer, he drew up the rope and swung himself down on the opposite side of the wall. As his feet touched the ground, he was seized by two pair of arms from the rear. A cloth was thrown into his mouth. A rope was thrown about him, and in less than ten seconds—without a word or an outcry—he was flat on his back, bound hand and foot and drifting away into space.

CHAPTER VII

PRINCESS MARIE LOUISE thrust her hand into the hollow in the oak for the fifth time—and for the fifth time drew it out empty. Then she stepped back and regarded the tree in much the same manner as she would have regarded an old and faithful servant suddenly grown impudent. There was disappointment and vexation in her drooping mouth, and there was perplexed questioning in her eyes. Could it have slipped down into some crevice? No—her search had been too thorough for that. It was incredible, but true—there was nothing there.

For three days there had been nothing, and for three days Rudolph had not come to Castle Thanlis. She had heard from him, to be sure—a verbal message brought by Cesare, his

THE FACE OF THE KING

body servant, expressing his great regret that he was kept so close by affairs of state. She had even seen and spoken with him at the palace, but never alone where she could ask him the question which kept repeating itself over and over in her own brain—what had happened? Why did her lover come no more to the garden of Castle Thanlis? He did not seem to her like a lover now.

Princess Marie Louise was no mean-spirited young woman. She loved the King with the whole love of her heart, but she was not the person to waste her passion upon an unappreciative one. If, for any reason, the ardor of Rudolph of Molbania had cooled, she would be the last woman in the world to hold him to his promise or force him into an alliance which was distasteful to him.

But no, it could not be possible. Recalling his bearing at their last secret meeting, she could not bring herself to believe that Rudolph had grown cold in three short days. It was

THE FACE OF THE KING

unbelievable. Nor could she, for a moment, entertain the idea that he had been pretending to a love he did not feel. It was much more probable that his present seeming coldness was counterfeited for some reason which she could not understand and which he would presently explain.

Yet—what could the reason be? And if there was such a reason; if he knew that someone had discovered their secret and that their rendezvous was watched, why could he not get word to her that such was the case? He might have sent a sealed note by Cesare. He knew well enough that no other would dare to open a private communication coming from his hands and intended for her. To communicate with her in that way would be contrary to court convention, but what did court convention matter as compared with a misunderstanding between themselves?

She had tried—oh, so hard—to read the answer to her riddle in his face; to communicate

THE FACE OF THE KING

with him through the language of the eyes; but to no avail. There was no message for her there. As he looked at her, which he had done very seldom these three days past, she could read admiration there, but nothing more. There was none of that sense of subtle understanding either in his face or his manner. Indeed, he seemed more like a stranger than like the man who had held her in his arms and who had vowed eternal love for her. Physically he seemed the same as ever—but there was something gone out of his face. There was a difference in the soul which looked out of his eyes.

Formerly, when she had been about, his eyes had been only for her and he had cared little or nothing for the prerogatives of royalty. Now there seemed to be nothing else which interested him. Morning, noon and night he was busy with the affairs of state or with the court functions. He omitted none of the ceremonious details—he extracted to the last

THE FACE OF THE KING

ounce the homage of his people and his courtiers. He had given an order for his portrait to the French painter, De Fowles, and would soon be sitting for his picture—alone. It was not like Rudolph to do these things. It was not like Rudolph to want his portrait painted without her.

Only the night before, she had observed that he was not looking at her as they stood talking in the grand ballroom—and, following his gaze, she had found that he was looking in a mirror.

What could it all mean?

If Rudolph of Molbania thought his royalty entitled him to treat a Princess of Thex-Schwegstein with indifference, he would find himself mistaken!

Marie Louise frowned fiercely at the oak tree. Her fingers clenched and she turned her face from the castle. Then she stamped her little, dainty foot. In another moment she was on her knees before the tree, her head buried

THE FACE OF THE KING

in her arms upon the little bench where she had sat so often and so happily in the company of her lover.

Her vexation spent itself in tears, and her pretty cheeks were stained like a sorrowing child's when she raised her head to find the Baroness Von Houlburg regarding her with a mingled look of compassion and disapproval.

The Princess scrambled hastily to her feet, dabbing at her eyes with the daintiest of lace handkerchiefs.

"This is an odd situation in which to find a Princess of Thex-Schwegstein almost upon the eve of her marriage," said the Baroness heavily. "I fear that I must report this to Your Highness' father. He will be none too well pleased to know that his daughter has been concealing her thoughts and her feelings from her duenna—nor to know that she has so far forgotten her dignity as to weep like a peasant woman in the gardens of Castle Thanlis."

"I was not weeping!" declared the Princess

THE FACE OF THE KING

indignantly. "I was trying to get a bit of dust out of my eye."

"And how, may I ask, did Your Highness come to get dust in her eye upon a day such as this, when there is not a breath of air stirring? And, further, may I inquire, how is it that I find Your Highness with her face down upon a bench?"

The Princess looked confused, but answered readily enough, with some spirit: "I do not admit your right to question me, but the fact is, I was watching a—a worm."

"What sort of a worm?" pursued the Baroness but without the suspicion of a smile.

"Oh, a very remarkable worm!" exclaimed the Princess. "A fuzzy worm, all blue, and he went down in a crack, and as I was trying to see where he had gone I got some dust in my eye and it made it water."

"No doubt it was the worm who threw dust in your eyes," said the Baroness sharply. "But no worm can throw dust in mine—no,

THE FACE OF THE KING

nor any Princess, not even Your Highness."

"How dare you?" cried the Princess with indignation. "How dare you compare me to a worm?"

The Baroness was somewhat taken aback, but she stood by her remarks.

"I am not aware that I have done so, Your Highness. I am doing only my duty as I see it. I promised your father that I would look after you as I would my own daughter, and, God willing, I mean to do it.

"Oh, you may punish me if you like! You may send me away; but, so long as I remain at your side, I shall endeavor to remain faithful to my trust."

Her voice grew firmer as she went on.

"For a long time I have suspected that all was not well—that you were concealing something from me and so——"

"And so you set Ruprecht to spying upon me!" interjected the Princess hotly.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"And so I took steps to find out the truth," corrected the Baroness imperturbably. "I observed that you were in the habit of spending much of your time in the garden——"

"I do as much at home."

"But not at the same hours," continued the Baroness. "I observed that you were in the habit of writing letters which were not mailed."

"How did you know that?" asked Marie Louise curiously, biting her lip with vexation as she realized that her question was an admission of the truth.

"Easily enough," replied her duenna. "Your letters you give to Ruprecht to be mailed. When I saw six letters on your writing desk and found that Ruprecht took only five for the post, I knew that the odd one must be delivered by hand or left somewhere where it could be found by the person for whom it was intended. And so by the exercise of a little thought I settled upon that tree behind you."

THE FACE OF THE KING

The Princess started. She looked at the tree as though it had betrayed her maliciously.

"Why this particular tree—or why a tree at all?" she demanded.

"Child!" exclaimed the Baroness Von Houlburg, "do you think you are the first young woman in the world who ever fell in love? A tree with a hollow trunk is a natural post-box for lovers. It has been so always, ever since——"

"Since you were a girl, yourself, eh, Baroness?"

In spite of her annoyance, the Princess was pleased to see that her shot in the dark brought a flush of red to the cheeks of the Baroness.

"Exactly so!" she replied. "And, knowing this, I knew what I would never have believed if anyone had told it to me: I knew that Your Highness had betrayed her trust and had been foolish enough to listen to the words of another lover upon the threshold of her married life."

THE FACE OF THE KING

She regarded the Princess sorrowfully.

"Oh, my child, don't you realize what a dangerous game it is that you are playing?"

But the Princess was busy thinking. Suddenly her face lighted and she exclaimed: "Come, come, Baroness, give me the letters and I will forgive you for spying upon me!"

"Letters? What letters, Your Highness?"

"Why, the letters from the King—the letters you have taken from the tree."

"The King? The tree?" The Baroness was nonplussed. "Do you mean to say that the man to whom you have been writing and who has been writing to you was the King?"

"Of course," said the Princess sharply. "Of course it was the King, as you must know yourself, now that you have taken his letters."

"The King!" Baroness Von Houlburg was overcome. "Oh, Your Highness, forgive me that I have done you this injustice. I never dreamed——"

THE FACE OF THE KING

"But the letters—let me have the letters!" the Princess insisted.

"There were no letters, Your Highness. I did not take any letters."

The Princess paled.

"But there must have been letters!" she gasped.

"There were no letters, dear child," said the Baroness slowly. "Before God, there were no letters—no letters at all."

CHAPTER VIII

RUDOLPH of Molbania could hear his captors conversing in low tones a few feet from the spot where he lay. Bound, gagged and blindfolded, he had only his sense of hearing left to apprise him of his surroundings and of the identity of his assailants. Their conversation was pitched in so low a tone, however, that he could neither make out their words nor recognize the voices of the speakers. He felt a distinct sense of satisfaction in the thought that he had severely bitten the hand which thrust the gag into his mouth, for, by means of this, he hoped eventually to identify the man who had so mistreated his monarch. Angry and outraged though he was, he could not restrain a certain feeling of admiration for the man who was able to

THE FACE OF THE KING

endure such pain without an outcry, for, though he had sunk his teeth deep into the flesh, the man with the gag had said nothing at all, evidently repressing the natural exclamation of pain for fear his voice might be recognized.

Presently his captors picked him up, set him on his feet and propelled him toward the roadway, where he felt himself lifted into a carriage and seated between two men, one of whom pressed a revolver against his temple as a silent reminder that he was helpless and that any attempt to wrest himself free from his bonds would result in death.

As the motor started purring, Rudolph realized that what he had mistaken for a carriage was a motor car and a limousine at that—a form of luxurious conveyance which had been theretofore unknown in Thetrograd. Whose it could be he had not the slightest notion. Despite the warnings of the Princess, he had firm faith in the loyalty of his cousin, the

THE FACE OF THE KING

Archduke, and, though he suspected the Austrians of having some hand in his abduction, he could guess neither the immediate object of this kidnapping nor the destination for which they were bound. The Princess! His heart was full of her, but he could not speak, on account of the cloth in his mouth.

The motor was soon purring steadily and the car sped along the uneven streets of Thetrograd without stopping, taking the sharp corners at a dangerous angle and turning into the Boulevard of St. James—as he guessed by the sudden change from cobble and mud to asphaltum—without sounding its horn and without slacking its speed. Neither of the men in the car spoke a word. The King could not tell whether or not the side curtains were drawn, but assumed that they were, and that he was being watched closely by the guards at his side. He therefore resigned himself to thinking out some probable cause for the out-

THE FACE OF THE KING

rage until such time as the car should come to the end of its journey.

In his uncomfortable situation, he felt that he had been riding for hours before the motor car left the Boulevard, although he knew that such could not be the case. It was a matter of less than half an hour to reach the outskirts of the little city in one of these modern conveyances, and, even on horseback, he could gallop to the end of his kingdom in half a day's ride. Where were they taking him? To Austria? If it were the object of the captors to get him out of Molbania, this would be the easiest plan, for the Austrian border was much nearer than that of Servia, and certainly the Austrians would be taking their lives in their hands to attempt such a mad project as that of carrying the King of Molbania into the territory of their hereditary enemies. His sense of direction told him nothing, and he realized, as he felt the motor leave the smooth pavement and begin to jolt over the ruts of a country road, how

THE FACE OF THE KING

dependent man is upon his sense of sight, and how little he has retained of that instinct of direction which is to be observed in the most stupid of the lower animals. As for Rudolph, familiar as he was with every road and bridle path in the immediate neighborhood of Thetrograd, he was entirely at a loss. He strove in vain to identify the road by the number of turns, but he soon grew so weary from his cramped position and so confused in his efforts that he was no longer able to tell whether the machine was swerving to the left or the right. He gave up the attempt, and before he knew it his weariness overcame him. He fell asleep.

When he awoke, while he was yet half-dreaming, he heard the voices of his guardians, who were speaking in low tones, evidently under the impression that their prisoner was still wrapped in slumber.

"So far, so good," said a smooth voice on his right. "If the Englishman but does his part

THE FACE OF THE KING

as well as he should we should have no further trouble."

The voice was very familiar to the King, but he could not, for the life of him, place it.

"Trust him," said a heavier voice on the left with a slight trace of the Teutonic accent. "That is the one thing which he can do better than anything else. He will do well, because he will forget why he is doing it."

"And this one?" queried the Right Voice. "Where are we taking him?"

"To Lerumberg, for the present, at least," responded the Left Voice. "How long he will remain there will depend somewhat upon the length of time it will take to perfect our plans."

"Lerumberg!" echoed the Right Voice. "Why not to my country? It is much safer there."

"Lerumberg was what His Highness said," replied the Left Voice impatiently. "Lerumberg suits me well enough. For my part I've

THE FACE OF THE KING

enough of these cursed Molbanian roads already. Thank the good God we will soon be at our journey's end."

"But we should be there already. It is not far."

"True, but one does not make a journey such as this in a straight line; one might be followed."

"But will it not be, perhaps, the cause of some intervention by the Powers if this man be taken out of the country? It is one thing to restrain a man on his own soil—it is another to remove him from it. Do your employers know of this part of our project?"

"Pooh!" said the Left Voice lightly. "It is nothing. There is no need that they should know. The less they know until all is over, the better. It will save them embarrassment if they are questioned. It can make no difference in the case of the Englishman."

The King repressed a start. Could it be possible that these men had mistaken him for

THE FACE OF THE KING

someone else and had carried him away under the impression that they had captured a foreigner?

"But," insisted the Right Voice, "England is said to be very touchy regarding her subjects, and I know this to be true from my own experience in the diplomatic service. This man's companions may miss him; what if they start an inquiry?"

"The man is mad; that is all there is to it," said the Left Voice. "It is permissible to restrain a madman wherever he is found; it is even permissible to deport him if he be taken into that country from which he last came."

"But how shall we prove that he is mad, if he be found?"

"There will be no need of that. He will prove it himself."

"How is that?"

"He will claim that he is the King of Molbania."

The King's head swam. Evidently these men

THE FACE OF THE KING

were not aware of his identity. They mistook him for an Englishman and a mad Englishman, at that. What could be the meaning of it all? Surely he had not said or done anything which could have led them to suspect that he was other than what he was? He had not, in fact, been given an opportunity to utter one word from the moment he was attacked at the foot of the wall. No, they must be pretending. Yet they believed him to be asleep. What object could they have in speaking thus, if they knew the truth concerning his identity?

Suddenly the car came to a stop. The two men upon each side of the King seized him by the shoulders and shook him to waken him. The right hand guardian stepped out of the motor and assisted the King to alight. This was no easy matter, as he still wore the blindfold and very nearly fell in reaching for the step. He had no sooner set both feet on the ground than he felt the other captor at his elbow. They led him quickly into a doorway

THE FACE OF THE KING

and up a long flight of stairs. Apparently they entered a room, though what the character of the room might be, he had no means of knowing.

"I will return in a moment," said the man with the German accent, addressing his companion. He clattered away down the stair, apparently being in no fear whatever of being overheard, and returned a moment later, accompanied by another man—a third person—as the King guessed from the sound of the footsteps. He was confirmed in his belief that a third person had entered the room a moment later when the newcomer spoke.

"By the light," said the new voice, "in the straight chair."

The King felt himself thrust into a chair and was vastly relieved to feel the gag removed from his mouth.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded, and was surprised to find that his voice was hardly raised above a whisper, so

THE FACE OF THE KING

strained were the muscles of his jaw. "I demand an explanation of this outrageous conduct!"

"If you have any regard for your beauty or your life," replied the smooth voice, which belonged to the man who had sat at his left in the automobile, "you will make no demands whatever for some moments to come, for it will be exceedingly dangerous for you to talk."

The King felt something wet and cold applied to his cheek. A firm hand was thrust under his chin, which was forced upward, and he shivered as he felt the contact of cold steel against his flesh. A moment later he almost laughed with relief as he realized the purport of it all. They were shaving his beard.

CHAPTER IX.

THERLOFF, Captain of the King's Own, was a born soldier as his father had been before him. Diplomacy played no part in his life and the niceties of court convention bored him. He was happier upon the parade ground than at his present post where he must, in a measure, adopt the mincing manners which came easily enough to those officers who regarded their swords as parlor ornaments and their uniforms as certificates proving them patrons of a good tailor. Therloff had seen service in the Great War; a fact which he did not permit the subalterns to forget.

But though he was no diplomat and knew little enough of the secret treaties and intrigue which are so characteristic of that part of the

THE FACE OF THE KING

world, he had a sort of dog's instinct which warned him of danger to his master. And this instinct, though he could not have put it into words, told him that Rudolph of Molbania had better friends than Basil Pulasky.

At the moment Therloff was enjoying himself hugely. He was as loyal as any man in Molbania to his master the King, but he did not extend his devotion to include all of the King's relatives, and among those who failed to win his regard was his Commander in Chief. Discipline demanded that he conceal his dislike for his superior, but he was keenly conscious of it, and it was therefore with the greatest pleasure that he combined the discharge of his duty toward the monarch and the discharge of his spleen toward the Archduke by barring the latter from the inner room.

Therloff stood guard before the throne room door. If he was smiling inwardly, no sign of it was betrayed upon his stolid countenance.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"His Majesty's orders, Your Highness," said he, "were that no one was to pass this door until five o'clock."

The Archduke flushed angrily.

"The orders do not apply to me, sir!" he replied sharply.

"I beg pardon, Your Highness," returned the unruffled Captain, "but his majesty specifically mentioned your name and said 'not even His Highness.'"

Pulasky stood for a moment irresolute. Upon the parade ground he had only to speak and Therloff must instantly obey, but here in the palace it was another matter, for here Therloff was, so to speak, upon his own ground and, for the nonce, was in supreme command so long as he obeyed the orders of the King. The palace was not only the official but also the private residence of the monarch; in the palace the word of the King was law and any attempt to force a passage past his guard might well have disastrous results.

THE FACE OF THE KING

The Archduke was tempted to rail at Therloff and at the order of his master, but upon second thought he saluted curtly and strode across the anteroom chamber to the Saint Paul window, where Ermin Pasha stood observing him in amused silence. This wonderful window was the pride of Thetrograd, for there was none to equal it this side of Petrograd. It had been installed at a cost of many thousand roubles by the late King Alexander, and never failed to elicit exclamations of astonishment and admiration from the visitors from the outside world. Standing beneath this window, with his beard dyed a bright blue by the light reflected from Saint Paul's garments, Ermin Pasha presented a curious picture. Turk and unbeliever, with a smile of cynicism upon his urbane countenance, he might have been Sathanus himself, standing in the shadow of some Gothic cathedral awaiting the outpouring of the congregation from an Easter

THE FACE OF THE KING

service, to reclaim his errant followers after the disaffection of a long Lent.

As the Archduke approached him, Ermin Pasha repressed his smile and greeted him gravely, but with a malicious twinkle in the eye.

"So," said he suavely, "our puppet is growing impatient of his strings? He threatens to come alive like the monster of Frankenstein?"

The Archduke growled.

"This is too much! I have put up with this nonsense long enough. He shall pay for his impertinence before I am done with him."

"Patience! my friend, patience!" counseled the Turk, looking about his cautiously. "Having gone so far along our road, it would be folly to lose all by reason of a hasty temper. Consider the character of the man. It is not in his nature to pass through this and keep his head altogether."

THE FACE OF THE KING

The Archduke stifled his anger and assumed an easier air.

"After all," he said, "the man is an artist as well as an actor, and the best we could have had for our purpose. Perhaps it is better that he should be overcautious than that he should grow bold and careless."

"Believe me, my friend, it is much better so," replied the Turk. "How did you find our friend—the Englishman—when last you saw him? Does he still persist in his mad delusion that he is his majesty?"

"I have not seen him at all," responded His Highness. "Zabriski keeps him well enough. It would serve no good purpose to let him know the truth."

"Is there, then, no danger that he will become really unbalanced and unable to resume the thread of his life when the time shall come?"

"Small danger of that," returned the Archduke. "The men of our blood do not go easily

THE FACE OF THE KING

mad. And if he were to do so, are there not others to take his place?"

"Our friend within, for example?" queried Ermin Pasha.

"If no other presents himself," responded Pulasky, smiling somewhat grimly at the Turk's jest.

"The Russian is still unsuspecting?" queried Ermin Pasha, directing his glance where Paul Bouloff had just entered the room accompanied by Miss Throckmorton and her mother.

"Blinded by the beauty of the Barbarian!" sneered the Archduke, following the glance of his companion. "What he can see in that doll-woman is more than I can understand."

"The Russians are notoriously of bad taste in this matter," said Ermin Pasha, "but she is rather attractive in her way. She does not, of course, compare with the future Queen of Molbania, but, blind though he be, friend Bouloff doubtless can see the folly of raising his eyes in that direction. But that reminds

THE FACE OF THE KING

me: how does the Englishman with the lady? Has he confirmed himself in her regard? And has he kept his secret?"

"Acting upon my advice," returned the Archduke, "he has seen but little of her and has written her nothing at all of any sort. He is excellent at faces, our friend, but, though he is so good at that, he might not be so good a forger; the face of the king and the hand of the king are not the same thing."

"And your own hand?" asked Ermin Pasha, "has it quite recovered from the bite of your hunting dog?"

He glanced significantly at the sling in which the Archduke carried one arm.

"I shall remove the bandage tomorrow," said he.

"Good! good!" said the Turk, "I have an idea that we may all need two hands before we are done with this affair."

At this moment the folding doors leading to the throne room were thrown open and Ther-

THE FACE OF THE KING

loff stepped to one side to permit the guests to enter.

The first person to enter the room was the Princess Marie Louise of Thex-Schwegstein, followed by the Baroness Von Houlburg and closely followed by His Highness, the Archduke.

The King bowed low over the hand of the Princess.

"It was good of you to come today," said the King in a low voice. "I feared that you might be vexed with me that I have not been more attentive of late, but affairs of state—"

His tactless remark trailed off vaguely as the Princess threw up her head and replied sharply: "I assure you, Your Majesty, I would be the last person in the world to wish you to neglect your duty. For my part, I had not noticed any lack of attention. Come, Baroness."

She turned almost abruptly and passed to the further side of the room followed by the

THE FACE OF THE KING

And the tone he used was not that of a subject, but the tone of one who commands.

CHAPTER X

THE King was beforehand for his appointment and was seated in the great chair of the cabinet when Therloff approached the desk to announce the fact that the Archduke was asking for an audience.

"Let him enter," said the King in a tone which seemed strangely at variance with the tone which he had adopted in the last few days.

Therloff bowed and withdrew, pulling aside the curtains to admit Pulasky.

The latter strode into the room, more in the manner of one who enters his own place than in the manner of one who comes into the presence of his sovereign.

"Your Majesty," said he, "I have asked for

THE FACE OF THE KING

this conference tonight, because it is imperative that we should give a direct reply to the representatives of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Austria. I have been talking to-day with Count Emil Schenoffvitch, and the Count informs me that he has instructions from Vienna to secure a definite answer from the court of Molbania within twenty-four hours or report to the Department of Foreign Affairs without further delay.

"This means simply that His Imperial Majesty has lost patience with the policy of shilly-shallying which Molbania has unfortunately so long maintained. I would therefore advise that you make your decision at once and appoint a day upon which the affair may be settled."

The King looked up from the papers which lay before him.

"I assume," said he, "that you are referring to the matter of the Austrian treaty?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

THE FACE OF THE KING

"I am quite ready and willing to sign the treaty," said the King, "and will do so if Count Schenoffvitch will present it to me on the evening of the day after tomorrow. Until then I fear I shall not have time to give the matter my attention."

The Archduke smiled sardonically.

"The day after tomorrow will suit excellently, so long as Your Majesty empowers me to state to the representative of His Imperial Majesty the fact that the treaty will be signed and give him your royal assurance of that fact."

"My word is pledged," said the King.

"It is enough," replied the Archduke. "Nothing, then, remains for me to do but to communicate with the Austrian agent and inform him of the hour at which the conference of the treaty is to be held."

"Nothing of great consequence," answered the King, "but still a little something."

The Archduke lifted his eyebrows.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"And that is——?"

"A little matter which has apparently been entirely overlooked in the stress of greater matters: the matter of my—well, shall we say, my interest?"

"What care need you have for that?" inquired the Archduke. "You have my word that the entire affair is for the interest of Molbania and that all who are of use to Molbania are certain to profit by it."

"It is a bit indefinite," said the King.

"The matter has already been taken up with the Emperor," answered the Archduke, "and he is inclined to be most liberal. I understand that he thinks nothing of conferring a title and estate upon those who have done him service."

"What he thinks nothing of, he may very well forget," replied His Majesty thoughtfully. "And a title and estate do not seem to me to be particularly munificent when one considers that we deal as two monarchs—one to the other."

THE FACE OF THE KING

In this, he spoke no more than what he thought. What were a title and estate in Austria—or perhaps in Hungary—to one who already held a royal scepter, however small the country which he ruled?

The Archduke regarded him curiously.

"I can assure you that whatever His Imperial Majesty consents to bestow will be worth having," he replied.

"And the wedding—the—that is to say, my wedding with the Princess Marie Louise of Thex-Schwegstein; when does that take place?"

The King seemed scarcely eager.

"That," said the Archduke positively, "need not trouble you—it shall be postponed."

"Will the Princess consent to it?"

"She will have no choice but to consent to it."

"It does not appear to me," said the King ruminatingly, "that Princess Marie Louise is the sort of young woman who is likely to

THE FACE OF THE KING

consider a postponement in the light of a compliment. It is possible that Your Highness understands her nature better than I do, but it seems to me that she is more than likely to pack her bags and return to Thex-Schwegstein at the first intimation of such a postponement."

"The information concerning the postponement," said the Archduke, smiling, "need not be conveyed to her in such a way as to lead to any such consequences as you anticipate. I think I can assure you that the Princess will not only not return to Thex-Schwegstein in consequence of the postponement of the wedding, but that she will be very loath to return there at all."

The King looked puzzled.

"You may be right in this matter," he answered, "I will not argue it."

He glanced searchingly at the Archduke. There was a growing suspicion in his mind that all was not as it appeared to be upon the

THE FACE OF THE KING

surface; that in his dealings with the Austrians, the Archduke was concealing some personal plan of his own which was neither known to nor anticipated by the Austrian emissary. Whether these plans would in any way affect the monarch himself, it was impossible to say; but certainly there was evidence in the manner of the Archduke that he was not laying all of his cards upon the table, even in dealing with those who were supposed to possess his fullest confidence.

Might it not be possible that Basil Pulasky had in his mind some more permanent arrangement than the present one, yet one which would be as different from the normal state of affairs in Molbania? Might it not be possible that, behind his apparent willingness to serve Austria, the Archduke Basil concealed some purpose of his own which would square with the interest of neither party? And if such a purpose existed, what effect might it not have upon himself?

THE FACE OF THE KING

The Archduke bore his scrutiny without showing any discomfort or apprehension. Indeed, he was not concerned at all with the thoughts which were passing through the brain of the man who sat at the table. The matter of the approaching marriage of the King had thrust into his mind a thought which had been there before but which had hardly taken root. A thought which pleased him more and more, the more he turned it over in his brain. He had hardly realized that the nuptial day was so near at hand. Absorbed as he had been in the business of arranging matters to the satisfaction of the Austrians, he had allowed his own personal interest to be obscured a little in certain directions and had not planned as far ahead as was customary with him. He must look to it that no unexpected slip-up should occur.

"Count Schenoffvitch is empowered to act for Austria," said he. "I will inform him of Your Majesty's decision."

THE FACE OF THE KING

As he turned to go, the curtains were parted and Captain Therloff stood at attention within the door. The Archduke paused.

"Princess Marie Louise of Thex-Schwegstein," said Therloff, "presents her compliments to His Majesty, King Rudolph of Molbania, and begs that he will do her the honor to come to Castle Thanlis immediately upon a matter of great importance."

A curious expression flitted across the face of the Archduke. The King looked plainly uncomfortable. For a moment there was silence in the room.

"Tell Her Highness that the King will come!"

The voice was that of the Archduke.

CHAPTER XI

RUDOLPH of Molbania looked out of his barred window across the Austrian hills toward his own little dominion, which lay hidden from view, and where his enemies were working God knew what mischief in his absence.

For seven interminable days he had been kept prisoner in the upper chamber of the inn of Zabriski—a ramshackle structure of uncertain date, which lay upon the outskirts of Lerumburg, just over the Austrian border. For seven days he had been left to his own thoughts—and torturing thoughts they were—except for the intervals when the inn-keeper brought him food and the daily visits of the village barber who came to shave him. He was well-fed and well cared for—better than

THE FACE OF THE KING

any other guest had been in the time of Zabriski, at least, and he had no complaint to make upon that score.

By now he was convinced that his abduction had been no error, but a deliberately laid plot upon the part of the Austrians, aided by he knew not what one of his own people. No Austrian, with the possible exception of Emil Schenoffvitch, could know of his meetings with the Princess. He had been followed upon the night of the Grand Ball—there could be no doubt about that—and followed for the express purpose of seizing him when he was off his guard.

That his cousin, the Archduke, could have had a hand in this enterprise, he was unwilling to believe. The Turk?—perhaps.

Nothing was to be learned from the two men who came to see him. The inn-keeper, he believed, knew more than he was willing to admit. The barber was not permitted to converse with him. While the shaving was being

THE FACE OF THE KING

done, the inn-keeper sat in the room and whenever the barber opened his mouth, Zabriski gave him such a look that he closed it like a dog snapping at a fly. Zabriski, himself, talked readily enough upon any other subject, but his answer to any question concerning the reason for his prisoner's confinement was invariably a non-committal shrug of his broad shoulders and a shake of the head.

Rudolph, when he had become convinced that there was no mistake as to his identity, had fully expected to be approached with some sort of proposition from his captors. Whether or not the Austrian government had had a hand in this outrage, he was unable to conjecture. It seemed improbable unless, by chance, the Emperor had made up his mind to annex Molbania without warning and without warrant in international law. Such a course would certainly precipitate another world war of the Powers. It was more likely that this kidnapping was a private enterprise,

THE FACE OF THE KING

in the interest of Vienna, perhaps, but of which Vienna knew, and wished to know, nothing.

Rudolph turned wearily from the window just as the bolts were shot on his door, and Zabriski entered. The moment his eyes lit upon the figure of his guardian, Rudolph knew that there was a change in him. Instead of the sombre expression which had seemed constitutional with him, Zabriski's face was expanded in a genial smile. His step was unsteady, his cheeks were flushed. He flung open the door with a flourish and swaggered into the room like a sailor on shore leave.

"Ha!" he said, curling one end of his great black moustache over his forefinger. "The bird grows weary of the cage—is it not so? The young eagle of Molbania would try his wings in a flight across the hills?"

"Well, my lad, for my part, I do not blame you for that, but I fear it is not yet time to attempt a flight, for the eagle of Austria is on the watch and, unlike the eagle of Molbania,

THE FACE OF THE KING

she has two heads, the better to guard her prey.

“And, my friend,” he added impressively, “she has all four of her eyes wide open. It is useless to think of fooling her.”

He sat down astride a chair and humorously regarded the prisoner over the back of it, his arms folded across his chest.

“It is not for nothing,” he added, “that Zabriski keeps the inn at the cross-roads. The Emperor—God save him!—is too wise to put his whole trust and reliance on the military. He knows well enough that Zabriski is worth six forts and a troop of scouts when it comes to playing the watch-dog. ‘The alert Zabriski’—that is what they call me in Vienna, my young friend, for they know my value. Ha! You start! You are surprised to know that the name of the humble inn-keeper is known so far afield? You would be more surprised, my lad, if you knew all.”

He shook his head shrewdly.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"But Zabriski will not tell you—no, the discreet Zabriski—those are the words of Count Schenoffvitch to His—to his friends, the discreet Zabriski knows how to keep a close mouth and guard a secret. Devoted to duty, but not unkind, that is what you may say of me, young master. See! I have brought you a present which I will share with you, to show that my heart is not hard though my will is of iron."

So saying he fished into the voluminous pocket of his sheepskin coat and produced a thin-necked bottle of wine. He passed it to the King, who received it gingerly and regarded it with a gleam of suspicion in his eye.

Zabriski caught his look.

"No! no! You need have no fear upon that score!" he laughed. "If they had meant to kill you, they would not have brought you here for the discreet Zabriski to watch over you. Drink! I assure you you will find nothing better this side of Vienna."

THE FACE OF THE KING

"With pleasure," responded Rudolph politely. He had no desire to drink, but neither did he wish to antagonize the inn-keeper. He filled a glass and raised it to his jailor.

"To Molbania!"

"Down with it!" the inn-keeper responded, swallowing his own drink with keen relish, both of it and of his joke.

Again he filled his glass and again he drained it. Glass followed glass and boast followed boast till he looked in the bottle and found it empty.

"Paul!" he roared at the top of his lungs. "Paul! Fetch me a bottle!"

He continued shouting at half-minute intervals until Paul, a bedraggled urchin of perhaps twelve years, climbed up the rickety stairs with a bottle in either hand.

Zabriski seized them and playfully threatened to brain him with one of them.

"Devil take you!" he cried in mock anger. "What do you mean by keeping me waiting?"

THE FACE OF THE KING

I'd have you understand, my lad, that I am the master in this house and when I speak I will be obeyed. Will you have them saying in Vienna that the alert Zabriski is kept waiting for his wine?"

The boy cringed. He knew that Zabriski was joking, but he did not know at what moment the simulated anger might become real, so he lost no time in getting down the stairs again, out of harm's way.

"There are no more good servants left in the world," commented the inn-keeper as the thump-thump of the lad's feet died away on the stair, "every man is for himself and the less he does for his master the better he is satisfied. Take, for example, Paul there; he gets a good home—an excellent home—and money upon his birthdays and holidays, but is he grateful? Not he! He would sell me to the hangman for a frosted cake! And you are not served much better. If there was such a thing as loyalty in the world—beyond that of a few of us who

THE FACE OF THE KING

serve the Emperor—God save him!—you would not be here now, but safe in your own place.”

The King listened eagerly to the conversation of the inn-keeper, hoping against hope that he would let drop some real information. As his attention was rewarded by this hint of treachery, he thought to draw the man out.

“Just what do you mean by that?” he asked.

“Are you insinuating that my servants have played me false? I tell you there are no better or truer men in the world than those who serve Rudolph of Molbania!”

He said this with such an air of pride that the inn-keeper was completely fooled as to his intention, and answered roundly:

“Loyal! Loyal! And you here a prisoner? If the Emperor—God save him!—were served by such as serve you, he would have been dead long ago. Loyalty—pooh! there is no such

THE FACE OF THE KING

thing as loyalty in Molbania; from the lowest to the highest—yes, to the footsteps of the throne, they are disloyal.”

In spite of his boasted kindness of heart, Zabriski was something of a bully and enjoyed baiting his helpless prisoner by casting slurs upon his countrymen and the loyalty of his people. He did not realize how he had planted in the King’s mind the suspicion which the King had theretofore resolutely shut out, in spite of the warning of the Princess.

“It takes now an Austrian like myself to understand the meaning of the word duty. It takes one who has served his ruler in peace and in war to labor day and night in the cause of his master.

“Here am I—look you—up at the dawn to see that I have safe the prey of the Austrian eagle. Here am I laboring all day long in the service of my country, and what do I get for it? What do I get for it? A bottle of wine and the knowledge that I have done my duty!

THE FACE OF THE KING

'There is that barber—the Devil take him—he is late again!'

Zabriski swung round to face the doorway as the barber, bag in hand, knocked timidly at the threshold.

"Paul told me you were here," he said apologetically.

"Here!" shouted Zabriski. "I am here and here I have been for this past half hour waiting your coming. Fall to work now and get this job done, I have other business afoot."

The barber rapidly got out his tools and set to work to shave the King. Zabriski watched, commenting upon his clumsiness, urging him to make haste and cursing him for coming so late to the inn, until, overcome with the fumes of the wine and the exertion of talking, he rested his head on his arms and fell asleep.

Thus was presented to the two other men the opportunity for which both had longed: the one because he hoped by means of the barber to learn of some means of escape; and the

THE FACE OF THE KING

other because he was by nature a talkative man, and to spend a half hour in shaving one with whom he could not speak was almost more than he could bear.

Summoned to do his work without explanation and threatened with dire calamities if he ever divulged anything which he saw or heard while at the inn, the barber had performed his services with no very great relish. He was aware of the identity of the prisoner, for he had seen his pictures. Lerumburg was too near the line for the citizens of that village not to know the ruler of the neighboring kingdom. But he knew also that there were some powerful people mixed up in this affair and Zabriski had assured him that any attempt upon his part to meddle with what did not concern him would result disastrously for him.

"Our friend seems to be asleep," said the King as the barber paused to hone his razor.

"Yes, Your Majesty," responded the barber before he thought.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"So you know me, then?" demanded the King.

"No! no, Sire!" responded the frightened barber. "I know nothing at all—nothing at all!" He busied himself with his brush.

"Come! come!" said the King, in an agony of fear lest this opportunity pass before he could take advantage of it. "You know me right enough. And, knowing me, you are missing the chance of a life time to make your fortune."

The barber regarded him with an odd mixture of fear, cunning, and cupidity in his eyes.

"What do you mean, Your Majesty?" he inquired.

"I mean that if you will help me to get out of here, I will make you rich; I will do better than that—I will give you a title in Molbania."

"Titles are of no use to men in my profession," responded the barber honestly, "but I should like well enough to be rich."

"Only," he added, "I could not think of

THE FACE OF THE KING

helping you to get away, for if I did Zabriski and the others would kill me sure."

"What others?" demanded the King sharply.

"The Turkish gentleman and the man with the sore hand," explained the barber.

"So, the Turk was in it, after all," Rudolph muttered to himself. "Look you, my man," he continued, turning to the barber. "This is the opportunity which may never come to you again—will never come to you again. Help me to escape and I will make you rich—tomorrow—tonight! Come with me, if you are afraid to remain. Come with me to Thetrograd and I will make you barber to the court."

"I am afraid," repeated the barber, like a child, "I am afraid—but," he took a sudden resolution, "If Your Majesty will promise your protection and wealth in Thetrograd, I will chance it."

The King sprang to his feet.

"Come, then! We have no time to spare.

THE FACE OF THE KING

Zabriski will wake—may wake at any moment.”

“Shall we tie him?” asked the barber.

“No,” answered the King, “he might waken and rouse the house.”

Together they sped down the stairs as quietly as possible, each squeaking step sending their hearts into their mouths.

When Zabriski woke, a moment later, he rubbed his eyes and looked about him. Failing to see the King and the barber, he rubbed his eyes and looked again. Suddenly the meaning of it dawned upon him. Fully sobered, he jumped up and pounded down the stairs, yelling “Paul!” at the top of his voice.

Through the inn he dashed and out into the stable yard, where he met the amazed Paul approaching the house.

“Wake up, damn you!” yelled the inn-keeper. “The prisoner has escaped! Fetch me the mare!”

THE FACE OF THE KING

Paul shivered like one in the presence of death.

"She is gone, sir!" he stammered.

"The cob then, and be quick!"

"The cob is gone, too, sir. Both are gone!"

CHAPTER XII.

HAVING told the Baroness Von Houlburg the secret of her meetings with the King, Princess Marie Louise felt that she had lost a part of her precious courtship, but this worried her less than the fact that the King no longer sought her in secret.

Though she had held up her head proudly at the court, she had sought the seclusion of her own chamber immediately upon her return from the court reception and there, throwing herself upon her bed, she wept the tears which had been threatening to spring into her eyes all the afternoon and which she had suppressed only by the utmost effort of her will and by summoning to her aid all of her pride. It was not only that she missed the romantic

THE FACE OF THE KING

thrills which she had so enjoyed when waiting for her lover, but that she now began to fear there must be some serious change in her suitor—that for some reason or other he had lost interest in her, or had in some way been prejudiced against her. Devoted as she knew the King to be to the interests of Molbania, she could not believe that mere solicitude for the State would lead him to neglect her. No, there must be something deeper than that behind his sudden change of manner.

Vainly she went over in her own mind every word she had said and every word that he had said at their last meeting. It was true that she had urged him to hurry and that he had been loath to leave so hurriedly, but he had called back jokingly and good-naturedly from the top of the wall. He had not been angry then and he could not be angry now, unless, perhaps, someone had been talking with him, or—she hated herself for the thought—unless he had meanwhile met some other woman who

THE FACE OF THE KING

was now proving a counter-attraction to her own charms. Rudolph, she assured herself was not the sort of man to be caught by a passing fancy. Unlike some of the other royal young men of the Balkans, he was not given to frequenting stage doors or all-night restaurants, even when in Paris. There was not another young man of royal blood in all Europe who had a better record morally or a cleaner reputation. His worst enemies could not say that he was anything but a moral man in his daily life. It must then, be something else.

She was still reflecting, calmed somewhat by her tears, when her meditations were interrupted by a respectful knock at her chamber door. She rose hurriedly calling out, "In one moment." With a damp cloth she removed some of the evidences of her weeping spell and opened the door. It was Ruprecht.

"Your Highness," said he, "there is a young American lady here—a Miss Emily Throckmorton—who asks that she may have

THE FACE OF THE KING

the honor of a short interview with you. She is accompanied by the Russian Ambassador."

"Show her into the tapestry room and say that I will be down shortly," said the Princess closing the door.

She was not in the mood for visitors, but she was naturally kind of heart and she had noticed the young American girl at the court. Knowing what a store most Americans set by the acquaintance of royalty and near-royalty, she did not like to disappoint the young woman. She had been disappointed herself today, and it would make it easier to make someone else a little happier. She therefore dressed carefully with the aid of her maid, Gretta, and half an hour later entered the tapestry room looking as fresh as though she had never known an hour of unhappiness.

Emily Throckmorton, clad in a blue tailor-made gown, was seated when the Princess entered, but immediately rose and came to meet her. Count Bouloff, still clad in his court

THE FACE OF THE KING

dress, was examining the backs of the books in the long, low bookcase which ran down the right wall of the room. He also turned as the Princess was announced.

"I hope you will pardon me, Your Highness, for this unceremonious intrusion," began the American girl. She was flushed with embarrassment, but her voice was assured. "I should not have presumed to come to see you in this way if it had not been upon a matter which appears to me to be of the utmost importance. Count Bouloff will vouch for the urgency of my errand, for he knows that nothing short of the most serious matter would be enough to lead me to take such a step."

"I can indeed," responded Bouloff, rising nobly to her remark, though he had not the slightest notion what her errand might be.

"There is no need to apologize," said the Princess smiling, "I am always happy to see visitors to Thetrograd and since I am so soon to be a Molbanian myself, I feel that it is my

THE FACE OF THE KING

duty, in a way, to play the hostess to them all."

"Not," she added, "that it is a question of duty only, for I am always happy to see young women of my own age, and especially from your country. I am happy to see you also, Count Bouloff."

"I thank you," said the Russian, bowing, "but with your permission I shall be going for the present and will return in an hour for Miss Throckmorton. I know that she has something to impart to you which is meant for your ear alone, and I am sure that she will be easier in her mind if she is permitted to tell it to you when there is no third person present."

While Emily protested a little, she was willing enough that he should follow out the program thus laid down, so that it was not long before the two young women, the American girl and the Princess were left alone in the great room.

THE FACE OF THE KING

Emily rose.

"I hope you will forgive me for coming to you with this foolish story, but I just couldn't rest until I had told you."

"Forgive you—nonsense," said the Princess, "I thank you. I confess it does not seem anything very extraordinary for the actor to wish a photograph of His Majesty, yet I have had much the same feeling that you have, that there was something afoot which I could not understand; something which might mean mischief to the King. Therefore I am glad that you came and told me all that you heard and saw. It was very thoughtful of you."

"Now you must join me in a cup of tea and we will chat until the Count comes back for you. I want you to tell me all about that wonderful country of yours of which I have heard so much and which I have never seen."

Princess Marie Louise set out to be agreeable, and by the time Bouloff called for Emily, the American girl was convinced that there

THE FACE OF THE KING

was no more charming and gracious hostess in the whole world than the future queen of Molbania.

When her visitors had gone, Marie Louise sat down to think the whole matter over. The more she thought about it, the more she became convinced that there was something wrong and that the sooner she went straight to the root of the matter the sooner she would learn the secret. Much as she disliked to appear as a suppliant for the King's favors or the King's company, she realized that the quickest way to come to a complete understanding with her fiancé was to talk it all over with him and force from him some explanation of his seeming indifference.

Three times she went to her writing desk and three times she rose again before she finally screwed her courage to the sticking point and sent for Rudolph. She would not stoop to write when the King did not. If he sent her verbal messages, she would do the same by

THE FACE OF THE KING

him. When Ruprecht had left for the palace, she would have called him back if she could but since she could not, she walked the floor in an agony of apprehension lest the King should put the final slight upon her by refusing to come to her in response to her request. It was not long, however, before Ruprecht returned bearing the word that the King would come immediately to Castle Thanlis.

Some twenty minutes later she heard the sound of a motor horn and looking out at a window, saw a limousine turn into the yard of the castle. The door was opened and a man's figure sprang out. She stood rigid awaiting the entrance of the King and her spirit almost failed her when Ruprecht entered and drew aside the curtain to permit the entrance—not of the King—but of the Archduke.

"Your Highness," said the Archduke, evidently speaking under the stress of great excitement, "I come in place of the King. His

THE FACE OF THE KING

Majesty started for Castle Thanlis some moments ago, but met with a serious accident upon the way. He has been taken back to the palace. He is calling for you and you must come at once—otherwise—”

He left the sentence unfinished.

The Princess Marie Louise swayed as though she would fall.

“Is—is he badly hurt?” she gasped.

“So badly that there is not a moment to lose,” said His Highness gravely.

Marie Louise caught up a scarf from a chair.

“I will come,” said she.

CHAPTER XIII

THE horses were pounding along the road leading up the hills just over the Molbanian border when the King looked over his shoulder for the first time—his companion had already established a record of several hundred backward glances—and saw four little black dots on the white ribbon of highway which dipped down into the valley from Lerumburg.

“They are coming!” he shouted to his companion.

The latter twisted his head around on his thin neck like an angry and frightened bird.

“My God!” he breathed through his clenched teeth, “They will kill us both!”

“They must catch us first!” laughed Rudolph, “They are coming on nicely now, but

THE FACE OF THE KING

when they strike the rise they will find it is not so easy going. As for us, we will soon be at the top of the hill."

"But—we—cannot—run—down—the—other side!" gasped the barber, his face like paper.

He began beating the cob with his clenched fist, having neither spur nor whip with which to urge his mount. The honest cob, already straining itself to keep up with the mare, turned its head inquiringly and galloped stolidly on as though nothing had happened. The mare, responding to the pressure of the King's heels, leapt forward as though she were in the valley running on a level course.

"Wait, Sire! wait!" the barber pleaded, great beads of sweat standing out on his brow as he saw the mare slowly forging ahead and, in his imagination, saw the King ride on without him, "My horse cannot keep pace with yours!"

The King drew rein good-naturedly.

"Make haste!" he called out, "We have a

THE FACE OF THE KING

good start of them, but we cannot spare our horses. It is now or never, for if they gain upon us before we reach the top of the ledge, I fear we shall not be able to reach shelter."

The four black dots, which had been all-together a moment before were now spread out a little on the ribbon of the highway. It was evident that the faster horses were setting the pace and that the others were beginning the ascent of the long hill.

On pounded the cob and the mare, the latter still fairly fresh though a trifle breathed with the exertion of coming up the ascent at a full gallop, while the cob was showing signs of exhaustion. His fat flanks heaved and his lips were flecked with foam. He heaved great sighs as he labored to keep even with the lighter animal.

At the foot of the hill the four black dots appeared as four horsemen, the foremost being the inn-keeper, his huge shoulders shaking as he jounced up and down on a saddle far too

THE FACE OF THE KING

small for him, guiding his horse with one hand and swinging a revolver from the other. The second rider was the boy, Paul, looking anything but pleased to be riding out adventuring. The third and fourth horses bore members of the village police force of Lerumburg, equipped with carbines. These two looked a little dazed, having been pressed into service by the inn-keeper upon his excited recital of the escape of a mad Englishman from his inn.

"But, Master Zabriski," protested one of them, leaning over the pommel of his saddle, "You have not told us what you were doing with a mad Englishman in your inn, nor why you had him there."

"Pah!" exclaimed the inn-keeper, "What is that to you? If you would remain in the police, you would do well to learn to do your duty without prying into the affairs of his Imperial Majesty — God save him! It is enough that I tell you this is a government matter."

"I do not like this crossing of the border—"

THE FACE OF THE KING

began the other policeman, when suddenly he broke off, shouting, "Look! Is that not your madman at the top of the hill?"

"Aye!" shouted the inn-keeper furiously, shaking his revolver at the fugitives, "It is—and that traitor of a barber. Ah, but we will soon have them again in our hands and he shall suffer for this trick he has played upon the discreet *Zabriski*! He shall learn that no lather-mixing mongrel can play tricks upon the alert *Zabriski* and live to tell the tale! On! On! We gain upon them!"

It was true. The distance between the two parties had lessened so that what had seemed black dots to the King could now plainly be seen as horsemen, though yet too far away to be recognized as persons. The pursuing party gained steadily until the King and his companion were almost at the top of the rise, when the inn-keeper, rising in his stirrups leveled his pistol at one of the fleeing riders and fired. The rider threw up his hands and rolled from

THE FACE OF THE KING

the saddle, his horse stopping short as he felt himself relieved of the burden on his back. The other drew rein, jumped from his mount, bent over the fallen man, but in a moment sprang again into the saddle and set off faster than ever.

By the time Zabriski and his party had reached the top of the hill, the fugitive was well down the other side and entering the valley which lay immediately below the city of Thetrograd, though the capital was still a good ten miles away.

"Halt!" cried Zabriski, as he pulled up his horse beside the fallen man. The man was lying upon his face, his hand still clenching the rein of his bridle. Zabriski lumbered down and turned him over.

"Hell's fire!" he exclaimed, "It is the barber! Swine!"

With this parting salute he thrust the barber in the side with the toe of his boot and remounted.

THE FACE OF THE KING

When Rudolph had seen that the barber was dead, he had wasted no time in mourning over him. He had hoped that Zabriski and his party would linger for a few moments at least upon coming up with the body. He now saw that they had not done so, but had come on with hardly a moment's loss of time. He was relieved, however, of the necessity of keeping the mare back for the cob, and he pressed his heels against her flanks, urging her on with voice and hand. She responded nobly, as though she instinctively divined the importance of her rider. The King was a good horseman—there was none better in Molbania—and being a good horseman he knew that he could not keep up the present pace for much longer. Zabriski and the two policemen were now close behind him. The boy had seized the excuse of the slain barber to linger behind and was following at a safe distance in the rear of the pursuing party. Weaponless as he was, the King knew that he had only to surrender

THE FACE OF THE KING

to save his life. It would be an exceedingly risky thing for the inn-keeper to shoot at the sovereign of Molbania, for the Archduke, though a traitor to the state, might not easily condone the murder of his cousin and the revenge of an outraged Molbanian was not a thing to be lightly reckoned with. The police, however, were probably unaware of his identity and if not warned by Zabriski not to shoot, they might pot him at any moment.

The thought had barely passed through his mind when he heard the crack of a rifle behind him and heard a bullet sing over his head.

"Too high," he muttered to himself, bending lower in the saddle.

He was no longer looking behind, but ahead. For straight before him he saw a sight which caused the blood to rush back to his heart in a great wave of relief. Coming around the corner of the hill were three horsemen, riding in the military fashion, who quickened their

THE FACE OF THE KING

pace to a gallop as they caught sight of the chase.

For a moment it crossed Rudolph's mind that these might be more enemies. The telegraph was not unknown in Molbania, though the only line was the government line. If it were a fact that his cousin was back of his abduction, a message might have been sent to bring a party out from the other end of the road to intercept his flight. His fears were soon proved groundless, however, for it was only a moment or two before he recognized the leading rider as Captain Therloff, who was accompanied by two troopers of the King's Own.

"Therloff!" cried the King, "to my rescue!"

Therloff galloped up.

He looked at the King blankly, evidently failing to recognize him, but willing, as always to lend his support to the under dog.

"What is the trouble here?" he inquired gruffly.

THE FACE OF THE KING

As the inn-keeper and the two Lerumburg policemen rode up, the troopers of the King's Own unslung their carbines and held them at ready.

"Halt!" exclaimed the Captain in an authoritative voice. "What do you mean by chasing this man along the highway?"

"He is an escaped lunatic," responded Zabriski sullenly.

"Escaped from where?" inquired Therloff.

"From my inn in Lerumburg."

"And what are you doing with lunatics there?" asked the Captain. "Do you think you can cross the border of Molbania and shoot men down on the highway? Lunatic or no lunatic, this man is in my charge. I will answer for him."

"He is the Englishman, Wallace," exclaimed Zabriski raging. "He was held under restraint by the order of His Highness, Archduke Basil, who will have something to say if he is allowed at large."

THE FACE OF THE KING

"Then he can say it to me!" answered Captain Therloff, biting off his words with deadly emphasis. "As for you—" turning to Zabriski and looking him directly in the eye, "You had best get back to Lerumburg if you do not wish to go to prison here. And you, too," addressing the now thoroughly demoralized policemen, "get back to your own side of the border, or suffer the consequence!"

Zabriski foamed with rage.

"His Imperial Majesty—God save him!—shall hear of him and His Highness, too!"

The discreet Zabriski, in his anger, had forgotten his discretion, and had told more than he either intended or knew. He wheeled his horse sullenly and faced back toward Lerumburg.

"Go along with them," directed Therloff to his two troopers, "and see that they cross the border."

"There is a dead man back on the road," ex-

THE FACE OF THE KING

plained the King, "he was shot down for helping me to escape."

"A Molbanian?" asked Therloff angrily.

"An Austrian," responded the King.

"Let them carry him back to their own cursed country," said Captain Therloff.

The troopers trotted off down the road, their rifles ready and hoping, in their hearts, that Zabriski might get up his nerve to start a fight before they reached the border. The discreet Zabriski, however, had a little of his discretion left; he did not turn around until he was safe on Austrian soil.

As the troopers and the Austrians disappeared in the distance, Therloff turned to the King.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Don't you know me?" asked the King.

"I do not," responded Therloff sharply, "unless you are, as they say, the Englishman, Wallace."

THE FACE OF THE KING

He leaned over his saddle and peered at Rudolph.

"You look like the picture of the actor which was shown when he played here," he announced. "Yet there is something familiar about you after all."

"There should be," laughed the King. "Therloff, don't you know your King when you see him—and you the Captain of the King's Own?"

"The King!" Therloff regarded Rudolph with incredulous astonishment. "The King is in the palace. I saw him there less than an hour ago."

"Impossible!" Rudolph replied, "for he has not been there in a week. One week ago I was kidnapped, carried away to Lerumburg, where I have been ever since, a prisoner in the inn of that man, Zabriski, whom you have just sent about his business."

Perhaps Zabriski had been right after all, thought Therloff, this man was evidently mad

THE FACE OF THE KING

as a March hare; yet it was a bitter pill to find an Austrian right.

The King looked as puzzled as the Captain. A king at the palace—what could it mean?

“Therloff,” said the King, suddenly assuming a tone of command. “Answer me this: who gave you that cross of the Molbanian Legion?”

Therloff instinctively straightened in his seat in obedience to the voice which he had so long obeyed.

“The King,” he replied.

“You were alone upon that occasion?”

“We were.”

“In the cabinet of the King at two in the afternoon?”

“We were but how——?”

“What did the King say to you upon that occasion?”

Therloff straightened his shoulders.

“That is between His Majesty and myself.”

“Then if you will not answer for your King,

THE FACE OF THE KING

your King will answer for you," said Rudolph, and bending forward he spoke a few words in the Captain's ear.

"Good God!" exclaimed the astonished soldier. "Then it is true! You are His Majesty! But who is the man in the palace?"

"I cannot tell you," replied Rudolph, "but we will soon find out who this imposter may be."

"He is more like you," stammered the astonished Captain, "more like you than yourself!"

"In what way?"

"In every way. He has a beard——"

"They shaved mine off."

"He walks like you, talks like you."

"That might be learned by a mimic—or an actor!"

Like a flash of sunlight, the solution of the mystery had penetrated the King's brain.

"Therloff," he cried, "it is the actor, Wallace, who is at the palace! If they have passed me

THE FACE OF THE KING

off for the actor, they have passed him off for me! He looked like me, you say it yourself, he could be made to look more like me. He could imitate my actions—my speech.”

“Your Majesty is right!” responded the Captain. “I remember now that he has not been altogether the same. There has been something odd about him—something somehow—he has been ill at ease. He has looked into the mirrors, and he has denied admission to his cabinet before three in the afternoon.”

“But the Princess?” demanded the King, “did she not know that it was not I?”

At the mention of the Princess, Therloff suddenly went pale.

“The Princess, Your Majesty, has seen but little of him since the night of the Grand Ball, and now——”

“And now?”

“And now the Princess has disappeared!”

CHAPTER XIV

AND so," said Therloff, concluding his narrative, "I have been out with these two troopers scouring the country roads to see if we could anywhere come upon a trace of the limousine in which the Princess was carried away."

"A limousine!" exclaimed the King. "It was a limousine in which they took me to Lerumburg. This is a valuable clue, Captain! It was evidently the same mind which planned both of these abductions, and most probably the same person who superintended them. Let us be quick!"

"And that would be——?"

"Who else but His Highness, my cousin? You heard what the inn-keeper said, 'His Highness orders'? It is Basil beyond a doubt.

THE FACE OF THE KING

By Heaven, if he harms her, he shall answer to me though he be of the blood royal and my cousin to boot. Come, Therloff, there is not a moment to be lost, we must act at once before any harm befalls her."

Therloff's heart misgave him that she might have come to harm already, but he feared to add to the King's agitation, so he kept his fear to himself.

"I am ready, Your Majesty, I am ready to go anywhere, but where in God's name, Sire, shall we go? We have no more idea than the man in the moon where the Princess can be or where they have taken her. The limousine has disappeared as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed it. We have searched every road about the capital and we have not found a person who has seen or heard of it."

"True!" groaned the King. "True! But are you sure that you have tried every road?"

THE FACE OF THE KING

Have you tried the road to the North? Oh! I must find her."

"We have tried the road to the North, Sire, and the road to the South and there we met Ermin Pasha, who vowed he had been searching upon his own account upon the request of the Baroness Von Houlburg and that there had been nothing upon that road."

"The Turk! He is in it, too!" exclaimed the King. "You did not stop upon his word?"

"No, Your Majesty, we searched, but without result."

"Hah!" cried the King suddenly. "Have you looked in my hunting lodge on the Turkish road?"

Therloff hung his head.

"Not yet, Your Majesty," he replied. "We knew that the King—or the man we thought was the King—was at the palace, and it never occurred to us that anyone would be so bold as to select such a place to take the Princess."

"Come!" said the King sharply, shaking his

THE FACE OF THE KING

rein and setting off at a gallop. Therloff followed.

"Your Majesty is not going alone?" he inquired solicitously.

"Not alone—but with you," replied the King.

Therloff shook his head, but spurred his horse. It was madness, he thought, for the King to venture to the hunting lodge without an escort. There would undoubtedly be someone left to guard the Princess—supposing she were there—and if they were the villains he took them to be, they would like nothing better than an excuse for making an end of the King before he could reach the capital and unmask the imposter. But, if the King would go, why, then Therloff would go with him and die with him if need be.

Silently they rode along at top speed, the King too busy with his thoughts, his fears and his anger to address a word to his companion, and Therloff respecting the silence of his

THE FACE OF THE KING

master whom he knew to be torn with many conflicting emotions.

Taking the first turn to the left, they sped along the muddy lane which they knew to be the shortest route to the Turkish road and the hunting lodge of the King. It was now fast growing dark and when the road plunged suddenly into the forest of Lownhein they could not see twenty feet before them, but let the horses have their heads and trusted them to keep to the road by instinct.

Branches swung low at the side of the road in places and more than once the King felt a branch tug at his sleeve as if someone had reached out of the darkness to pluck him from his horse. He tore himself loose regardless of scratches or rents in his clothing and urged his mount ever to a greater speed. For the second time that day, the mare was proving herself a thoroughbred. She kept the pace as well as Therloff's horse, and no one would think to see her rushing along the dark high-

THE FACE OF THE KING

way that she had already saved one life that day and was still stout of heart and limb, ready to save another if occasion arose.

Suddenly the riders came out of the wood into a clearing. A sort of bridle path led up a small hillock to the right where was situated the hunting lodge. As they came into the open the riders were challenged by a sentry.

"Who goes there?"

In the moonlight, they could see the soldier with his rifle at port.

"It is I," responded Therloff, "Captain Therloff of the King's Own."

"And the other?" asked the sentry without lowering his weapon.

"A friend," responded Therloff. "Who is at the lodge?"

"That," said the sentry, "concerns neither yourself nor me. What is my business is to see that no one enters the lodge."

"It is a business which you had better re-

THE FACE OF THE KING

sign," answered Therloff, "for I come by the orders of the King."

"Let me see your order," demanded the sentry.

Therloff thrust his hand in his tunic.

"Here they are," he said, riding forward.

The soldier, foolishly reaching out his hand for the paper, was suddenly seized by the wrist in a grip of iron, jerked from his feet, and fell to the ground with the Captain of the Kings' Own astride his shoulders. In a flash the King had dismounted and sped on toward the hunting lodge. He knew Therloff to be capable of taking care of himself.

The lodge was already lighted. As the King came to the entrance, he thrust his shoulder against the door. It gave suddenly and he almost sprawled his length upon the floor, failing to meet the resistance which he had expected. In a moment he was seized by a pair of stout arms. Struggling to free himself, the King caught a glimpse of his assailant's face.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"Cesare!" he gasped.

The man showed surprise but did not relax his grip. Together they wrestled about the room, crashing into the table and upsetting it, tripping over the great bear rug in the center of the room and finally crashing to the floor in a heap. The King fell beneath the other and was fully expecting a knife in his heart when he observed the other staring at the skin of his shoulder which was exposed by the ripping of his sleeve. There at the joining of the arm and the shoulder, just above the arm-pit was the little red arrow which had been there since birth and which was known only to himself and his servant.

Cesare shifted his eyes from the King's shoulder to the King's face. Upon his own features were painted astonishment and consternation.

"Great God!" he cried. "It is the King!"

He released his grip and helped his fallen master to his feet, still muttering aston-

THE FACE OF THE KING

ished oaths, forgetful of the respect due to royalty in the tremendous import of his discovery.

"The Princess?" demanded the King.
"Where is she?"

"Here!" cried Marie Louise, rushing in from the inner room. But, as the King threw out his arms, she caught sight of his altered countenance and stopped short.

"Is it indeed you?" she cried.

"It is I, Rudolph!" he replied, clasping her in his arms and kissing her passionately.

They were interrupted by the return of Cesare, who now came in with Therloff and the disarmed sentry.

"Your pardon, Sire," said Therloff, saluting.
"I think we had best be going, for the sentry tells me that the Archduke has planned to return here tonight. He has gone to Thetrograd for the signing of the treaty."

At the word "treaty" both the King and the Princess started.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"What!" exclaimed the King. "Do you mean to tell me that they dare sign treaties in my absence?"

"Tonight," answered Therloff, "there is to be a meeting at the palace. Schenoffvitch, the Austrian agent, is empowered to sign for Austria, and the actor Wallace, acting in your place and impersonating you, is to sign for Molbania. In two months' time the soldiers of Austria will be trampling our gardens on their way to Servia."

"Never! Before God, never, while Rudolph is King of Molbania!" cried his Majesty. "To horse! We must put an end to this masquerade before it is too late and Molbania is pledged to help the Austrians against her neighbors."

"Are there horses?" asked Therloff of Cesare.

"There is only one, sir," responded Cesare, "my own."

"Fetch it," said the King shortly. "I will

THE FACE OF THE KING

carry the Princess on mine. Do you, Therloff and Cesare, come with me. The soldier can remain here on duty. And look you," turning to the sentry, "if His Highness returns, place him under arrest and keep him so until you hear from Therloff."

It was the work of minutes to have the third horse saddled and the party of four were soon on their way toward Thetrograd, the Princess seated behind the King with her arms about his waist and her soft cheek touching his as she leaned forward to converse with him.

"Oh, tell me more," pleaded Marie Louise, "have you suffered? I have been so unhappy the past week, I could not understand.

"The Archduke told me you were badly hurt, and I thought that you were dying. I had forgotten your coldness—or I mean the coldness of the man I thought to be you. I wonder now that I could have made the mistake, thinking this Wallace was King, but he never let me come near enough to really look into his eyes.

THE FACE OF THE KING

He avoided me and his coldness set my heart on fire and made me so proud I would hardly let myself listen to his voice."

"Are you sure it was the Archduke who carried you off?"

"Yes, he came into Castle Thanlis and we entered the motor together. He told me he would take me to the palace, but no sooner were we within than he ordered the chauffeur to drive full speed to the hunting lodge. When I questioned him as to our destination, he gave me an evasive answer, and when I asked him more details about your accident, he told me that I would learn all as soon as we arrived."

As the King and his party approached the palace they were compelled to force their way through dense crowds of citizens who surrounded the building; crowds which were muttering sullenly, for the word had been passed about the streets that the treaty was to be signed and the sympathy of the Molbanians was with their fellow Slavs, the Servians. The

THE FACE OF THE KING

crowds gave way readily upon recognizing Therloff and the uniform of the King's Own, but gazed curiously at the King and the Princess. Some of the bystanders recognized her, but none recognized the King.

As they were passing up the palace steps in all haste, they were met by Count Bouloff descending, his face like a thunder-cloud.

"It is done!" he said to Therloff angrily. "The treaty is signed and Molbania is handed over to Austria."

"Impossible!" spluttered Therloff. "The man within is not the King but Wallace, the actor; the King has returned——"

"Ah, it is too late."

CHAPTER XV

ABOUT the council table in the King's cabinet were seated William Wallace, Ermin Pasha, the Archduke Basil Pulasky, Count Emil Schenoffvitch and Baron Nebrovitch, the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Bouloff, who had been present a few moments before, had left immediately upon seeing the signature, "Rudolph II of Molbania," scrawled upon the bottom of the paper which lay upon the table.

The faces of Schenoffvitch and Ermin Pasha wore satisfied smiles. The Archduke pushed back his chair. He was impatient to be off. He cursed himself inwardly for a bungler in permitting himself to get into such a position as he now found himself, bound to be in Thetrograd at the very moment when

THE FACE OF THE KING

his every interest—perhaps even his safety—demanded that he be at the hunting lodge where he had left the Princess.

“If Your Majesty will excuse me,” he began, when he was interrupted by the prosy old Baron Nebrovitch, who wished to discuss further the matter contained in the treaty and to urge that some guaranty be furnished by Austria that she did not mean to make use of Molbania as a cats-paw. There was no danger that Wallace would pay any attention to what the Baron said, or that the treaty would in any way be changed, now that it had been signed, but it was intensely annoying to have to remain in the palace when, for many reasons, he wished so strongly to be elsewhere. There had been only two men whom he could leave at the hunting lodge—only two whom he could trust—Cesare, being the King’s body servant, would do the King’s bidding, whatever it might be, and the sentry, being stationed without, knew nothing of the prisoner within.

THE FACE OF THE KING

He knew only that he was to admit no one. Yet—the unexpected might happen. In some way the Princess might manage to effect her escape, and if she did there would be trouble and to spare. In forty-eight hours he hoped she would have been persuaded to be his wife. She could not well come back to the capital with the tale that she had spent two days in the King's hunting lodge with the Archduke, unless she came back as his wife. But supposing she should escape tonight before he could compromise her future! It was no small thing to run away with a sovereign princess!

Perhaps there was some vague regret stirring in his soul that he had so betrayed his King and his country. If so, he sternly repressed any feeling of shame, for now, that he was in so deep, there was nothing left for him but to carry matters with a high hand and make sure of the future. Wallace would do well enough for the present. Now that the treaty was signed the next thing to do was

THE FACE OF THE KING

to arrange the matter of the Princess; then the King could be allowed to come back without scandal. It would be to his interest to do so, and he would not be likely to tell such an unlikely story as his would necessarily be. A promise could be extracted from him before he was released from his captivity, and once he had promised Pulasky knew that Rudolph would not go back upon his word.

Meanwhile the Baron drooled on interminably, going over clause after clause of the treaty until Pulasky could stand it no longer. He sprang to his feet.

"Your Majesty," said he, "I must go. I have a most important engagement which I must keep without delay."

"Your Highness need not discommode himself upon that account," said a quiet but stern voice near the door.

Whirling upon his heel Pulasky beheld Therloff, mud-spattered and weary, but bright of eye and alert as always.

THE FACE OF THE KING

"I will explain to Your Highness in one moment," said the Captain. "I have a message for the King's own ear."

So saying, he walked to the end of the table where Wallace sat. Wallace leaned forward to catch the message and Therloff whispered in his ear the one word, "Imposter!" at the same moment snatching off his false beard, and leaving him exposed bare-faced before his Minister of Foreign Affairs, who almost fell in a fit of apoplexy.

"Gentlemen," said Therloff smiling grimly. "Permit me to introduce you to the most accomplished actor of modern times—to Mr. William Wallace, late of the Criterion Theatre in London."

"Wallace!" gasped the Minister of Foreign Affairs. "Then where is the King?"

"The King is here!" said Rudolph, stepping within the door followed by the Princess and Bouloff.

THE FACE OF THE KING

Wallace, who had sat stunned for a moment, now sprang to his feet. His brain was whirling—his head hurt him. He had felt that peculiar feeling in his brain before when under the stress of great emotion. Now as he saw his kingdom—the kingdom which he had come to regard as truly his own—slipping away from him, he was overcome with rage. His face was a deep purple, his eyes flashed fire.

“By God, you shall not rob me!” he raged, pulling out his sword and thrusting Therloff to one side. He sprang at the King before Therloff could interfere. A piercing shriek rang out as Princess Marie Louise fell fainting in the arms of Bouloff. In three bounds the madman was across the room and thrusting with all his force at the heart of the King. But, if he was quick, another was quicker, and even as the stroke which was meant for the King descended, it met the resistance of another body, and the blade was sunk in another heart than his.

THE FACE OF THE KING

Basil Pulasky died without a sound. Stretched at the feet of the man whom he had betrayed and wronged, double traitor though he was, his timely interference had saved the life of the King, his cousin. Was it atonement? Or was it impulse, the habit of serving his King? Or, again, was it the one way out? No one will ever know.

But if Molbania did not consciously celebrate the restoration of her King, the Molbanians made holiday for him and his bride-to-be during the week that followed, when all Thetrograd was draped in the intertwined colors of Molbania and Thex-Schwegstein, while every shop window boasted portraits of the King and Queen and every schoolboy cherished his little iron eagle of Molbania—souvenir of the royal nuptials. General Therloff—no longer Captain—but still in command of the King's Own, as well as Commander in Chief, was at the King's right hand at the royal reception, and Queen Marie





**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

| | | |
|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 | 14 | 15 |
| 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 | 26 | 27 |
| 28 | 29 | 30 |
| 31 | 32 | 33 |
| 34 | 35 | 36 |
| 37 | 38 | 39 |
| 40 | 41 | 42 |
| 43 | 44 | 45 |
| 46 | 47 | 48 |
| 49 | 50 | 51 |
| 52 | 53 | 54 |
| 55 | 56 | 57 |
| 58 | 59 | 60 |
| 61 | 62 | 63 |
| 64 | 65 | 66 |
| 67 | 68 | 69 |
| 70 | 71 | 72 |
| 73 | 74 | 75 |
| 76 | 77 | 78 |
| 79 | 80 | 81 |
| 82 | 83 | 84 |
| 85 | 86 | 87 |
| 88 | 89 | 90 |
| 91 | 92 | 93 |
| 94 | 95 | 96 |
| 97 | 98 | 99 |
| 100 | 101 | 102 |

SEP - 5 1978

1875

1876

1877

1878

1879

1880

1881

